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Gigantic



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UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI-ST. LOUIS



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Gigantic

(umsl litmag 97-98)

Issue #14

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Printed
in USA

Cover:

David Spear

Pied Piper

cut color-aid paper
8inches x 8inches

Property of Univ. of MO-St. Louis

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1997/98

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University of Missouri - St. Louis
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St. Louis, MO 63121

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Neighbors

Layla A. Abuisba

(first place poetry winner)

Jubal the musician
Squats on the village street
Heels to the ground, he hunches down
His shoulders slightly bent
He is wrapped, one might say
Around his harp

His harp is a door
Where he patiently waits
Holding a simple garment of modesty
A new melody woven daily
The thread pulled from an invisible spool
To twine within his instrument

—6—

He is like a midwife
Holding a receiving blanket
He knows instinctively
How vulnerable is the infant
To cold or infection

Every day,
Jubal sits near the grocery
Of the servant of God
Weaving a fresh garment
Waiting for Hope to enter the world

Every morning,
Abdullah comes and says
I recognize the melody
Then leaves a dish of figs and bread, cheese,
Every few days
He'll add a pickle or two

At night when the heat of the day has faded
And the stars return without fail
Abdullah reminds Jubal
The music is sweeter under a prophet's moon

Once, Jubal spoke
He kept his ear close to the strings
He said, *our great-grandfather slew his brother*
And tried to conceal the crime

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The Box

Layla A. Abuisba

It was the mystic who
Discovered the box
At first dawn after eternal night

So there we began
On a street
Between the sun and moon
Twirling!
And calling out
Ya Allah!
Like ecstatic, sweating dervish

We held a festival
Invited the stars

—8—

We called our mothers and our fathers
Who left their memories
And gathered with us, proclaiming
This is for the coming year and all the years after

Yet all the while
Within our prize
We saw less than
The dusty, copper armor
Of a scarab beetle

But we celebrated
We were chosen
To fill the hollow space

The History Shop

Layla A. Abuisba

Abdullah opened his grocery
On the street between the sun and the moon
And everyday, Abdullah counted his inventory
And remembered
Rosewater and pearls
From the Levant to the Gulf.
Carob and silk, dates,
Dar el Beida
Before and after
Bogey and Bacall
Pronounced it
Casablanca

He remembered that he once
Swirled his hand
In the dust
At the edge of Baghdad
The crumbs on his fingers were
Ancient exhilaration and tears
Civilization

Abdullah's first customers were the children.
They stood at the case of sweets
And stared.
New cardamom and old.
He gave them his thoughts
Free
In a paper bag
They looked inside and wondered
Sugarless dates?

He saw a glimpse of something
When he looked in their eyes
A remembered someone

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Or an event of long ago
Ready to live yet again

He smiled at them and said,
Your eyes...your eyes!
Tell me, from where did you come?

Puzzled, they looked at the shelves around them
They walked to the window, pointed
And shrugged happily while saying,
From across the street!
Then they took the sweets and left him.

Big Foot

Katy Auffenberg

(runner-up poetry winner)

According to Jensen, Big Foot was only wounded in the initial burst of gunfire and was killed later in the morning when his movements attracted the attention of the soldiers. In his book Jensen points out that Reporter Carl Smith not only took the picture of this dead leader but he wrote about it in the Chicago InterOcean in January of 1891.

In the Voice of Big Foot

The reporter writes about me, "Big Foot lay in sort of solitary dignity"

He propped my dead body up for a picture and wrote of my wool underwear and

the scarf around my head. To the reporter I looked prosperous.

But what he didn't tell was of my spirit that roamed out over all the things of the

world. I didn't know what I was

as I looked down to see my corpse wrapped in so much material.

Before I looked down to see my body, I thought I was a river flowing deeply

through the earth.

I thought I had not ended and that maybe I would never end.

That is a solitary dignity that the reporter was afraid to write about.

That was the solitary dignity frozen on that dead man's face.

In the voice of the reporter

I have finally come across the body of Big Foot and I could
never meet him alive.

Even though I write in the Chicago paper about the clothes
that big foot wears

I am not interested in that I am only trying to write for a
certain market.

When I write of his solitary dignity I am writing about the
distant private cities

that I saw in this man's eyes.

I wanted his picture so that I would never forget those eyes.

Nor will I ever forget him lying in the snow like an unfinished
poem.

Ha! To think of all the people that will only read about his
underwear of wool.

At night I sometimes dream of him.

In the dream we are walking together but he never says a
word to me.

How do Birds and Bodies know their Season?

Katy Auffenberg

I woke up this morning and it is Spring but there is snow on
the ground.

The world outside my window is tinted

And the birds look like little tin men

As they stand chirping in the sun with the snow on them.

It has been seven months

Since I've breast fed my baby and

Each morning my breasts continually swell up

And milk slowly drips from me.

I ask myself, How do birds and bodies know their season?

I am tired of all this milk each morning

And all this snow in the spring.

I thought the milk and the snow would dry up by now,

And inside the skin all winter long

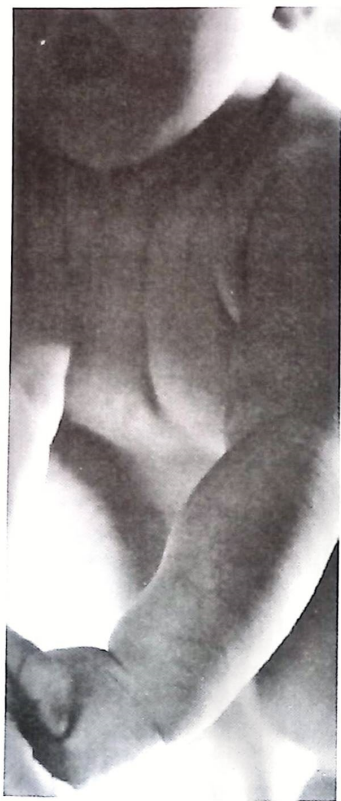
And sometimes nothing at all changes

It's just one long period of silence.

And this could be why my breasts

Feel like two aloof birds—

Two old nuns.



Scott Shewmaker
photograph

A Love Poem

Katy Auffenberg

My friend Fatima's uterus stopped growing,
When she was six months pregnant so her baby is a midget.
I see the look of envy in her eyes when she sees other
people's children.

And I tell her that her baby is the perfect metaphor for
everything that can be loved in this life.
Fatima can't have anymore children because her uterus is
permanently damaged.
Other more important things will come from her besides
children.

She writes letters about her sexual fantasies,
Changes her handwriting and then mails them to her husband
at work.

Love is a basement, where we never quite find what we are
looking for.

—15—

During the summers when I visit her place in Michigan,
overlooking the lake,

We nap with our babies on top of quilts in one big bed.
She says that so much water in one place helps her feel
located in the world.

The waves remind her of the abortion she had when she was
seventeen.

That abortion damaged her uterus.

Over the years the water has taught her to believe in an
existing spirit before there is flesh.

She now wonders where that spirit went.

We usually drive back to the city at night so the kids will sleep
in the car.

We carry them up four flights of stairs until we reach their
apartment.

Her husband usually has friends over while we are gone.

This time they are still around laughing when we return
So we leave them inside and sit out on her back deck.
She tells me that I need a man and I laugh
Because I wish I were alone on a train riding through the
countryside.

While a pack of twelve year-olds dig through the torn down
apartment building across the alley,
Their neighbor hums his soft skinned belly to sleep.
We hear their young voices yelling about a newly found pair of
woman's under-pants,
Old sinks, knives, and lost wigs.
And we too start to laugh because we are sweating and
because we too are so young.
We sit back and listen to the night take its slow steps into
dawn.
She says she feels love coming on as she feels the beginning
of a night.
And I tell her it isn't love but just the city hissing in the
summer heat with all of its people.



Derek Simmons
self portrait
acrylic on canvas
25inches x 40inches

God's Recruiter

Donna Munro

(first place prose winner)

I am a good, God fearing Christian. I get up early every morning to commune with God before I have to report to work. At each meal, no matter where I am, I take the time to pray. I go to church each Sunday and sing praises to God's Almighty name. I sing so loud, so deep that God surely must be able to hear my voice above the congregations.

I am not like the others I see every Sunday, squeezing shut their eyes in ecstasy. They confess themselves and ask forgiveness from God, but they do not follow his orders. They are not fishers of men. You see, I hear the pastors call, and at night, when my house is quiet, I hear God's call. The apocalypse is at hand. The end of the world. God needs an army and I am God's star recruiter.

—18—

This Sunday, we had talked about the coming of the Antichrist and the torment we'd face at his hands. Pastor said, "We'll all be tempted. Our children will dangle from barbed wire rope, waiting for us to take the mark. Satan will promise much for that mark--666 in the forehead or hand. He will buy, steal, and torture the people of God. Some of us shall be turned." I saw the fervor in the congregation's eyes. The women who raised their hands to God, stretching for his divine grace. The men, faces set like stone idols, nodding occasionally at the words. Children, getting their first tastes of apocalypse, eyes bulging, popping in fear. They had the fear of the Lord. They tasted the perfect loyalty to God. I was so disappointed when the sermon ended and conversation returned to lawn parties and garage sales. The Ladies auxiliary discussed holding a bake sale, as if they hadn't understood that the end is nigh.

They frighten me, that they can shut off their fear of the coming days. They believe, but only in church. I am the one who can make them understand, and once they do, I send them to God with clean, understanding souls ready for holy war.

Just last week, I ran into Emily Peterson at the Grocery and More. She pinched tomatoes and thumped on melons with her withered, blue vein hands. The same hands which on Sunday had balled into angry, indignant fists to chastise an unruly flock member for not taking the Bible literally. "If we don't," she said, "who will? The Antichrist is coming; you'll see your beloved wife's body torn to shreds unless you confess all before the Lord. You must accept the truth in the word. If you don't, Satan will torment you with lies in the final days." She had been the eldress, giving strength to the troupes. An old general with wiry wisdom. Where had it gone?

"Sister Emily," I said, smiling cheerfully and wringing those wonderful hands. "How are you today, sister?"

"Well Tom, I guess as well as can be expected." She smiled warmly, her wrinkled face drawing up like vertical blinds. "I have a touch of arthritis you know. Bothers me awful on hot days like this."

"Sister, I enjoyed your words at the service on Sunday. Inspired by God, I said to the pastor. You are one of God's foot soldiers Emily...a real inspiration to us all."

"Why thank you Tom." She blushed like a girl.

"Sister, may I help you get your groceries today? I know you often ride the bus, but allow me to give you a ride home today. I worry about that arthritis." I asked, my heart opening to her like the petals of a rose in the sun.

"Tom, I 'd be delighted."

As we walked through the store arm in arm, my heart beat steadied and I knew that God was with me. The pores on my body opened and perspiration beaded on my skin, making each nerve, each hair responsive.

"Miss Emily, if God called you home tonight would you have any regrets about your life?" I asked as she reached for some canned mushroom soup.

"Well Tom, that's an interesting question. I guess I regret never marrying, but that's no regret God hasn't heard in my prayers. No Tom, I can say I tried to do things right all my life. If I have anything to answer for, I am prepared."

"That's nice sister. That's real good to know," I said, feeling the air from the sliding glass entry door tickle my wet skin. We stood in the short check out line with impatient sinners whining about how long it took Emily to fish out her coupons and then stamping their feet as she counted out the price of her purchase, mostly in change. I gave them an indignant stare and took her arm protectively. They were trying to force the calm of Christian thoughts from her mind with their shuffling and muttering, and I would not allow it.

I escorted her slowly to my car, helping her ease into the front seat and loading her groceries into the car. Emily smiled again as I got into the car and started the engine. I swear, the glow of God was upon her. Throughout the short drive to her house, we talked of the Bible, Revelations, and the nature of the beast coming to test us all. Her wisdom, like a glorious wellspring, fed my strength. She was perfect for God's army and I would be the deliverer.

As we pulled into the driveway of her neat brick house, Emily winced rubbing her knuckles thick with arthritic swelling. I hopped from the car and helped her from the seat. She chatted to me, rubbing those hands to release the pain. As she explained the intricacies of her rose garden and the indifference of the neighborhood boys who cared for her lawn, I lifted the groceries from the car and into the house.

"Tom, you have been a God send today. Can I serve you tea perhaps?"

"Sister, I'd love some tea," I answered as I set the groceries down on her pink Formica counter. "I need to go lock up the car. I'll be right back."

She set busily to work, humming "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot" as she set water to boiling on her stove and plucked tiny teacups from hooks on the pine cabinets lining her kitchen. I hurried out to the car, mindful of the neighbors and children playing. I was careful not to let anyone see me, at least not distinctly. As I rolled up the windows in the car, I reached under the driver's seat and retrieved my oversized leather addition of the King Jame's Bible with the zipper and gold leaf pages. I carried it with me, skipping up the front porch steps quickly. Sister Emily already had the tea

bags soaking by the time I sat with her at the kitchen table. I laid the Bible on the table and began to swish the tea bags around.

"Ah, the good book." Emily nodded her silver head. "I see you like the King Jame's version. That's my favorite too."

"Yes ma'am. The Good News Bible is just too watered down for my liking. I want to feel like I'm a witness to Jesus' crucifixion and the martyrdom of John the Baptist. I want to hear their words. Not those watered down, nicely translated versions. The scriptures just aren't the same that way," I said, my fingers resting lightly on the bumpy leather covering of the oversized book.

"Yes. To many young people want to understand, but won't take the word of the Lord at face value," Emily agreed as she sipped her last spot of tea in her life.

"Sister, you love the Lord don't you?" I asked, my fever rising.

"Yes Tom. With every fiber that's me," she answered, staring at my twitching hands.

"You will be in the number of the Lord on that fateful day coming, won't you sister?" I asked, sweat pouring from my scalp and streaming off of my eyebrows.

"I believe I will be. Tom, what's wrong? You feeling O.K.?" Emily asked, her Christian compassion showing through.

-21—

"Yes, ma'am. You don't have any aspirin do you? I could sure use some."

"Let me get you some," Emily said and rose to get some from the bathroom.

I followed, carrying the Bible and rubbing my temple with the other hand. As she reached for her medicine cabinet, I wrapped my hammy arms around her tiny shrunken body, holding the flat of my forearm against her screaming mouth. Fear always took them for a moment as their mortal body's realized the soul's destiny--to be a martyr for God. I dragged her into the basement without much trouble. Emily's soul was strong in the Lord, but her body was weak with age.

I dragged her to the center of the wooden cellar floor and straddled her chest, effectively pinning her. I ripped her blouse from her and I think for a moment she thought I was planning to rape her.

"Emily, I would never commit the sin of rape. You should recognize me as a soldier of the Lord. My soul is pure," I explained with sincerity as I stuffed wads of her blouse into her mouth. "You sister are about to meet God. I admire your convictions and I know you will make an excellent soldier for the Lord. You know Armageddon approaches. I am doing you a favor. I am sparing you the indignities of the Antichrist and I am sending you to heaven a martyr. You will be received by Jesus Himself. The pains that plague you, the arthritis will be healed upon your glorious entry to heaven. Those wonderful hands will become those of a young girl. Their strength will be renewed and you will be with those host of hosts. Rejoice sister Emily, I send you to the sweet bosom of the Lord."

—22—

Emily struggled underneath me, flopping back and forth like a fish out of water. I know all she wanted to do was thank me for sparing her the evils of the upcoming invasion by Satan's minions on earth, but there was no time. I had to act fast and send her to heaven. With one leg pinning one of her arms, I quickly unzipped the Bible, dumping my tools from the hollowed out pages. With one arm free, she smacked and scratched my face, probably trying to comfort me for the weight of my heavenly duty but missing the mark in her excitement. I captured her arm and pushed it straight out onto the wooden floor and corrected my position so that I could hold her and the hammer and spikes. As I drove the first spike into her ancient, lovely hand, her other arm desperately struck my back. The blows were weak, unlike some of the other martyrs I made, and it didn't hamper my efforts slightly.

As the spike bit down into her white flesh, blood pooled underneath on the scrubbed wooden floor. Images of Christ's crucifixion blinded my eyes. Visions of the martyr's glorious deaths fed my arm as it pounded. I felt the spear penetrate the side of the Lord on the cross. I felt the thousands of torturous implements, striking blows on the innocents who had given their lives for God's glory. Arrows pierced my flesh, swords split my head, axes rended my limbs. My flesh caught fire, burning in the heat of the love of God. I felt Emily's beautiful pain as I pounded in the stake.

The first spike is always the hardest. Once it is in, the martyr seems to accept their fate and allow the other two to be driven, one in the other hand and one through both feet. Emily was no exception. Her lung's hitched for breath, whistling through her nose. She was singing! I joined her humming "Amazing Grace" in time with those miraculous whistling breaths. With the stakes driven, I stood, freeing Emily. Tears of gratitude streamed from Emily's yellowed bulging eyes.

"Sister, God shall repay you for your work on this earth. You will be a general in his heavenly army," I said, smiling calmly at her. I placed the wooden hammer back in my bible and drew out the final tools--lighter fluid and matches. "Now is the time Emily. Confess any sins you may have to God. Sing praises to Him. I send you into His arms."

The lighter fluid spurted over her in arcs, soaking her skin and clothes. With one final, quick prayer I threw the match onto her writhing body, setting her aflame with God's love. Knowing from experience how quickly the fire would overtake her material possessions, I scrambled up the stairs and through the front door. I purposefully slowed my pace, so as not to attract too much attention, got in the car and drove slowly away. On the way home, the clouds parted and a ray of brilliant light shot to earth like a ribbon. Say what you want, but I think it was God putting a show on for his newest addition to the heavenly family, giving her glorious soul a hero's welcome.

—23—

I am not worried about your earthly laws. I answer only to God. Besides, I am not a fool. I leave no evidence to find, since the houses burn before anyone can stop them. The cars I use are not my own. I work at an airport parking garage and return the cars before they are ever missed. I change churches often, since most churches only have one or two true soldiers of the Lord that worship within. Besides, God will not allow his recruiter to be caught.

I am a saint. My martyrs, wonderful Christians all, are spared the pain of the coming Apocalypse. They join God with pristine souls, ready to battle the minions of Satan. I will not allow them to be swayed, so I give them to God. I am, as you can see, a good, God fearing Christian.



Lynn Terry
photograph

The Color of Earth

Angela Hamilton

(runner-up prose winner)

Vermanda loved dandelions and bachelor buttons. In fact, every time she saw a patch creating a stronghold by the highway in the humid June air, she tapped the window with her ring and then leaned in close until her cheek touched the cool glass.

Edward looked the first three times he heard the tap and tried to make a comment, anything to keep her happy. But with each tap of the glass he grew more resentful, twisting his hand along the steering wheel, rolling his skin, making it pinch and sting.

Dupree Mansion was another thirty miles. In that distance, he began to make plans to leave Vermanda behind next year. Their traditional holiday at Dupree in South Carolina, had become harder to take the past two years. This time, Edward had to pay an old family doctor of Vermanda's to make daily visits during their vacation.

Edward wondered what Vermanda would do with her time. He noticed that she hadn't packed a swimsuit. She used to take the five minute drive from Dupree to the beach everyday in his '46 Olds. But after last year, Edward took her driving privileges away, so she would have to find a companion. Lizzie might, but she had lost all patience with Vermanda. It was up to him. He gripped the steering wheel harder. He heard the emerald tap the glass again.

.....

"I fluffed your sheets and comforter, the rooms look lovelier this year than ever. I think it's because I'm getting older." Lizzie went laughing down the hallway. She didn't even say hello to her sister, who had already taken her usual spot at the window with a book.

Edward unpacked their things and placed them in the wardrobe and dresser. Then he went out to see Dempsey and the hounds. Dempsey had been Edward's for three years. His chestnut color had caught Vermanda's eye.

"Oh Edward, he's the color of the earth on a hot day in August, when it's so humid you can't stand yourself."

Edward smiled. He had paid too much for the horse that he bought from a neighbor of the Duprees. But Vermanda had liked Dempsey so much. After the purchase, Edward drove them back to Dupree in a rush. Vermanda said she had a fierce taste for key lime pie. That had been only three years ago.

But Dempsey's color seemed duller this year. Edward looked for his brush. He could hear the cages of hounds howling at the new arrivals pulling up in their cars.

"Well Ed, who's it going to be this year?" Silver Dupree stood on the bottom slat of the wooden fence and leaned his firm body on the top.

"Has anyone been taking care of these horses? Dempsey's not even brushed. It doesn't look like he has been in weeks."

"Why sure he has, Ed. Don't you worry. My hands have been taking excellent care of your horse here. So how's Vermanda? I see Dr. Prade's car just pulled up in the driveway."

Edward looked slowly to Silver. "She's fine. Her doctor said she might be able to go back to the beach this year."

"Oh yeah? That's wonderful Ed, but you might think about going with her. I mean, we wouldn't want any harm to come to my sister, now would we?"

Edward continued brushing and soon heard Silver's voice speaking with someone about who was going to get the fox this year. His brush strokes became well defined, they began to look like a stream of water flowing across Dempsey's body, liquid brown.

.....

Dr. Prade sat at the foot of Vermanda's bed and folded his hands carefully on his lap. "So Vermanda, how do you feel today?"

She looked slowly to the window, the floor, then back to the doctor. "I'm quite sad about dogs a lot."

Edward pinched his bottom lip until the center turned white. Lizzie looked at him.

"See, doctor," Edward began, "our Vermanda here likes to entertain herself by thinking of someone who kicks their dog or

sacrifices it for religious purposes. Did you know they eat dogs in China? It's a delicacy over there."

"They kick them, those beautiful things. They're so innocent, they can't even talk..."

"...and so she tortures herself by thinking about the creatures."

"...they just lie there."

Edward smoothed his hair back. "Vermanda, please. She's a little overwhelmed with these... thoughts."

Vermanda got up and went to the window.

Dr. Prade looked over his glasses. "It sounds to me as though the hounds are bothering her. They are howling quite a bit this year."

Edward waved his hand in the air. "Oh, I think it's just the weather. There may be a storm coming."

"If only I could find them," Vermanda whispered in the silent room.

Dr. Prade's head turned slowly to Edward. He held up his hand. "Ed, may I see you?" He gestured to the door.

The hallway seemed cooler to Edward's relief.

"You must assume some responsibility for Vermanda. She needs your attention. I am not a psychologist, Ed. I can only look after her health. Please keep this in mind."

-27-

"I have no desire to pay a man for his time to come down here and tell me that my wife is a lunatic."

"Ed, you have to realize that your wife has a problem. It's not going away."

"Realize? That's all I ever do. Two years, she's been like this, Dr. Prade. I've known Vermanda all of my life. Why now? Why did I get stuck in this?"

Dr. Prade grabbed his case from the floor and stepped to Edward. "Why you? Why you for certain! Stuck how Ed? Think of Vermanda. She is stuck in a world she no longer understands, stuck in a house of people she barely knows and worst of all – a husband who doesn't care to know her or care for her. Why you? Love her, Ed. She needs you and stop the foolishness. Listen to her. She's tortured by her intelligence and you're too stupid to see it."

Dr. Prade moved to the front door, Edward followed. The oriental rug stuck in the door and it wouldn't shut properly. Both men fought from each side to secure it. Edward quickly jerked the door open to kick the rug cleanly inside.

"I also suggest that you quiet the dogs down, Ed."

The sound of the old man's steps were swept up by the hot wind and the howling.

.....

Later that evening, after dinner and a long smoke on the porch, Edward went back inside to see Vermanda. Lizzie had talked her into taking dinner in their room.

He opened the door slowly and saw only a faint light.

"Vermanda, have you eaten?"

No answer came from the musty room and Edward couldn't make out a figure in the bed or a silhouette by the window. He found her book lying open on a chair which sat next to the lamp. He picked it up and sat down. Thoughts of next afternoon's chase made his bowels roar, especially after veal cutlets and too much wine. He knew that it was too much for him this year. His name would not be announced as the winner. Edward's father had always warned him not to go into a chase feeling defeated, but Edward knew better than to expect things. Expectations of any nature were a cruel thing to place on himself. For the first time since he was seventeen, Edward would give up and riding would become a drudgery... for the first time.

Vermanda opened the bathroom door. "Edward, how are you?"

Edward sized up his wife who had seemed to grow thicker with her weaknesses. He looked down at the book, still in his lap, and realized that he was sitting still in a quiet room with his wife for the first time in months.

Vermanda sat on the bed, leaned back slowly, and laid her arm across her forehead. "I'm afraid your Vermanda doesn't feel her best, Edward. Why don't you come lie with her?"

Edward looked to the bed. He couldn't shake the feeling that an absolute stranger was summoning him. He thought of a time when she would have said that and without question he would have come to her. He missed her.

"Vermanda, why don't you take a nice warm bath?" Edward suggested this to her, hoping that she would realize that he remembered. He remembered the first night on his family's yacht when she fell sick. It was a month before they were married and Vermanda had talked Edward into staying up and drinking another bottle of wine with her. He pulled her away from the railing, fearing she would topple over it. He carried her down the stairs to his small room, and undressed her. She soaked in a bath then lay in the bed next to him with just a towel wrapped on her hair. He had never lain with her before. He wanted her to know that he remembered that she always took baths when she didn't feel well. He wanted her to know he was watching and listening to her.

Vermanda sat across the room leaning back on the pillows, her eyes appeared to be closed but were only narrowed, looking closely at her husband. Vermanda always told Edward that she felt like a plane moving in and out of the clouds and that she never really started to learn until she abandoned college. Its absence made her lonely for knowing things. Vermanda began to read the books she'd failed to read years ago. She found these books in a box at the bottom of her closet at White Birch. Some cracked as she opened them, others smelled of dust. But the loneliness never really left her -- it was just smoothed over by the words of Melville, Chaucer, and Dickinson.

—29—

At White Birch, Edward no longer slept with Vermanda. She had never questioned his decision to move to a different room. She redecorated the master bedroom. She ordered royal blue armchairs and threw out everything gray or rose.

Dupree mansion contained thirty-two rooms, of which twenty-three were bedrooms. On holidays, Silver Dupree filled every room with old family friends and acquaintances from the bluest blood in the state. To avoid having guests raise questions on the happiness of their marriage, or the sanity of his wife, Edward slept with her, restlessly.

.....

The next morning, Edward rose quietly at six a.m. He knew this day would end his winning streak. Even Silver had always looked up to Edward's riding and shooting abilities. But Silver was ten years his junior and lived at Dupree full time. Silver's youth was

Edward's advantage no longer. As Edward rounded the corner to go into the darkened kitchen on the east end, he heard two voices, one of which was Lizzie's husband, Shade.

"...just not invite them next year."

"It hurts, you know. Lizzie despises her presence. It's as if it weren't even a holiday anymore. It's an obligation."

"I wish it could go back to the old times. But since the beach incident last year... I don't know."

"That scar on her forehead never did fade. It's best if we tell them we're not going to do this next year."

"Shade, I think she gets crazier every year. Did you see all of those pill bottles?"

"Enough to kill a horse."

"Enough to kill ten horses."

Ed realized he'd been holding his breath. He took a sharp right and headed outside to brush Dempsey.

.....

Shortly after noon, according to Lizzie, Vermanda was missing. Edward quickly found her in the library shutting all of the curtains on the floor to ceiling windows.

"What are you doing, Vermanda?"

"I'm leaving no light for choices."

Edward sunk into the dimpled leather armchair and watched the dust creep through the last rays left of sun.

"No choices," he muttered.

Vermanda backed herself into the Northeast corner of the room.

"Silver cracked the egg."

Edward looked up to Vermanda, his back straightened.

"Cracked what egg?"

She twisted her dress in her hand. Edward went closer to her and fished for the curtain to his right. His eyes never left her shadowed face.

Vermanda grabbed his arm, something wet. Edward stopped.

"Silver cracked the egg on my head, that's all."

Edward gently held Vermanda's face in his hands and felt her scar and tears.

He would shrink from this, surely die at some point. Vermanda now hid from her brother and sister under the guise of spoiled emotions, too rich for the simple to comprehend. He would finish this holiday and take her away, she would never smell the blood again.

.....

Vermanda was in bed resting when the rider blew his horn and the others took off. The barking did not wake her, perhaps it was because she dreamt of the barking now.

She woke up when Lizzie opened her door. Lizzie sat in the chair that Edward had been in the night before. She stared at Vermanda as though she were waiting for her to attempt an escape.

Vermanda stared back.

Lizzie rubbed the back of her neck, arched her back, then reached into her pocket. She pulled out a business card and set it by Vermanda's thigh.

She walked to the door, then turned back. "He's good. Try him. He's not too far from White Birch, an hour or so. He could help you Vermanda."

Vermanda tore the card in half before Lizzie could shut the door. The door opened again, only slightly, without exposing Lizzie's face. "By the way, the holiday at Dupree has been canceled next year. Make other arrangements."

-31-

.....

Around the time that Vermanda's ears were alerted to the sound of Dr. Prade's footsteps in the hall, Silver's skilled shot pierced the neck of the fox four miles away from the house. Edward's shoulders slumped as he heard the roar of Silver's voice.

Vermanda used to wait with the women who came out to meet their husbands. She would wave frantically when she saw Edward coming. But she would always be gone before he reached the house and would not see him until he had washed. She said the smell of dogs and blood was thick on his hands – even if he hadn't touched them. He would say she was imagining it. Vermanda would turn her head in disgust and point to the bathroom.

After washing, Edward would lie with her and tell her exactly how he managed to get the fox again. Then he would make love

to her until they were summoned by a knock on the door for a late dinner. They fell in love every holiday for ten years.

.....

When the shouting of the men came closer to the house, Vermanda moved the tulle curtain and looked out. Silver lead the others, carrying the fox by its tail. He held it up high as he got closer to Dupree. His hand was stained with blood.

She pulled hard at the curtain. The tulle stretched and the rod fell. When Vermanda looked up, it hit her on the way down, bloodying her nose.

By the time Vermanda reached the lawn, most of the men had crowded around a garden table that held small cups of whiskey. She ran past the men, the ends of her white dress gathered in her hands.

Edward stood watching with the cup of whiskey slightly touching his bottom lip.

A few men looked back to Edward after he dropped the cup on his boot. He framed his head with his hands squeezing hard, as if to make everything disappear. Vermanda seemed to be running to a particular spot on the massive lawn. Her knees landed softly on the wet ground. Her hands went through her hair, pushed it away. She began to dig at the earth. Her fingers and arms turned red as her hands pulled at the grass to get to the dirt. The blood dripped from her nose. She shoved the clumps of dirt into her mouth.

Edward, still in his riding suit, ran out to Vermanda. He knelt beside her and grabbed her shoulders. She stopped and looked out to the surrounding woods. His eyes followed, looked out with hers. The others could not see Vermanda's face, but knew from the shaking of her frame that she was sobbing. She turned to Edward and held up her hands, clumps of dirt still stuck to the tips of her fingers like dough. Edward, now half brown, took her hand and placed her fingers gently in his mouth.

Napping

Lisa Odak

We fall into a nap together my child and I
his arm draped across my neck its wonderful heat
flaming, so much more than a chinchilla stole,
more than the fuzziest cashmere scarf or
favorite well-washed turtleneck, his arm
across my neck insurance that I won't get up
and leave him napping all alone, a guarantee
that after his eyelids close heavily and he
can no longer guard over my actions
we will still be together.

Old House

Lisa Odak

It's clear what matters even if a pain:
Brick cocktail dwelling designed for three.
Inside stippled walls a small boy laughs,
And golden fish swim and flowers grow.

I say it's a shame there's no great hand
To move it to someplace that's better,
Its pebbledash surface carried off,
This nonchalant charm that's bewitched you.

But what if a bullet comes inside?
Will picturesque masonry matter?
Does your blood in these timbers hold firm?
Do you sweat and your pain reign supreme?

—34—

It's clear what matters even if hard.
I'll too, love the whimsical Tudor.
We'll stay, for now, at fortune's mercy,
Her haphazard gifts like this brickwork.

Again it starts, as if for the first time

Byron Smith

My entry was smooth,
As it is and should be.
We slid and slished
Into some Aether,
Lost within ourselves
With one another;
Lost in unlit water;
Not concerned—
Once the lungs are empty—
About the surface.

Free-floating madness,
Flutter-trigger forces festooned descent,
Pulling body out of soul.
Six to four is one;
A two-dimensional medley
Fading into the hushing sound
Of water falling, beautifully
Misting the mouth of tributaries tread,
Panning fresh-flushed-flowing flesh
In search of that golden....

—35—

Then I'm left to go outside
With my hair soaking wet
In the bitter cold air;
No longer suspended
In the black comfort and carmine.
Begging the sickness to return,
I hold myself in, rendering
My appendages numb
To keep the tainted torso toasty
'Til the lights go out again.

Hairwashing, 1977

Amy S. Debrecht

There weren't many mornings when you didn't find me,
under the desk or the bed holding my breath.
My hair fit so well behind my ear, where it had stayed
twined all week, heavy and softened by its own oils.
After drawing the steamy sink, you searched in the name
of cleanliness. I hid from the stray suds that ran to my eyes,
the water that always found its way to my ear,
no matter how I craned and leaned backward
into the kitchen sink, clean dishes to my left.
The tight towel sometimes wasn't enough.
I suppose I thought one Saturday you'd give up or forget,
be distracted by a neighbor or the unswept corners.
But your face always appeared, sideways under the bed,
your own hair rolled so tight your scalp showed pink
in neat rows, and I knew when you unwound it, the curls
would obey, spring from the barrels and back.
But this late year, you had already tread to the sink
with five small hands, had long since given up reason
and bribes even. On this morning, no longer timid
with your delicate children but yelling,
as brother snapped the camera behind you
and your attention followed the flash.
I broke from your foamy hands and sat up,
thought about running as the warm suds slid
down my neck, one arm still looped about your waist.

Month

Dale Denny

Fly a kite into a poem and see
 hope and despair,
scud clouds and high, icy cirrus
 taut threads stretched
 to heaven's steep roof,
string in a gutter,
children who run through mud and gravel,
who tug until their palms bruise,
but only care the kite turns
finally upward. Here, you have
the month of March.



Christine Flavin
photograph

Regarding kites that have escaped from children

Dale Denny

Incident 7

Glance Meadow, Rhode Island

After six, failed muddy sprints
over freshly thawed turf,
Eleanor hands the spool
to little Elton, who thinks the twine
is strange, new candy.

Their red bow kite rises,
one yard,
then five
before Elton chomps.

Before she cries
Eleanor runs, jumps,
misses the severed, rising strand.

—39—

Incident 21

Widcat Pass, New Mexico

Blaine Junior's kite
has snagged,
and twisted
the Super Bowl
off his father's rooftop
antenna.

Incident 74

Tarkio, Missouri

Of the kites
a scout troop flies
this March Sunday:

eleven
meet trees
six
engage power lines
five
Marry pond water
Two
Break up due to circumstances
One
Lingers high
Until stars come out.

State Highway 3 to Waterloo

Dale Denny

This night
cattle in shed lots
stand asleep
wide with sweet, red clover

Black loam field
swallow
full moon light.

In town,
Beehive Bowl sits dark,
but the magic, touchless car wash
hisses,
wet, bright, ready.

One white dog
without a leash,
or even a collar,
dashes across the court house lawn.

Right now,
steering closer,
I am happy.



Jeremy Pratte
"Home on the edge of
unreality" (with detail)
ball point on paper
30inches x 45inches

Guest Trombone Player

Paul Calvert

He's become maudlin, and increasingly irritating, so much so that I'm no longer enjoying his company. He showed up last week with his trombone and a cardboard St. Louis or bust sign. The first two nights I felt blessed to have a roommate, but tomorrow I think I will ask him to leave.

In the beginning our times were uproarious. We shared boxes of wine and listened to Coleman Hawkins records, Thelonious Monk, Lead Belly. The apartment smelled like wine and bologna. It was good.

When he called me collect from Iowa I was eating applesauce. When he called me saying he was coming into town I felt letting him stay with me was the least I could do. He said he just wanted to visit a few people before he flew out to California, maybe pawn the trombone, and since it was Christmas, I said Christ, stay as long as you want.

Perhaps if he had helped pick up the rent I would let him stay. But he hasn't pawned the trombone. Nor does he have any intentions of pawning the trombone. I am concerned that he may never get on that plane to California. He has no money for a ticket and no money to help pick up the rent, though each day he says he finds money in the sofa. I am certain pawning the trombone won't bring enough for the price of a ticket, and I have no money to give him.

—43—

When we are not planning a trip to the pawn shop, our conversations regard forming a brigade of saints and marching to California. I don't want to go to California. When I tell him this, or when I tell him that there are no saints anymore and that if there were they wouldn't want to go to California, he begins sobbing.

I have been having nightmares each night since the bleeding stigmata appeared on his forehead, wrists and feet. Even when I am awake it is unnerving. But I try not to stare because I know he's self conscious about it.

My relationship with Jesus Christ is deteriorating. When I have anxiety attacks or seizures he laughs and tells me to snap out of it,

yet he expects me to console him when he moans for the good old days, and expects me not to laugh when he speaks about his big plans. He says he plans to play his trombone and that we will follow him, marching into the ocean, but he also planned to pawn it, and planned to get a job. I will ask him to leave tomorrow.

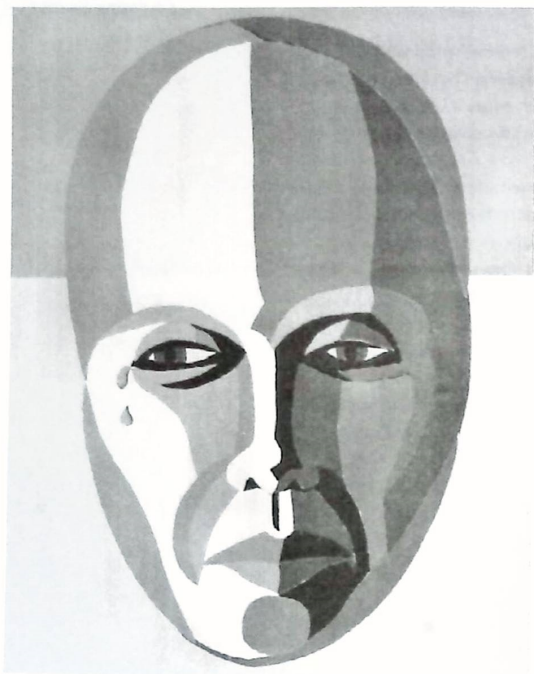
Vacation

Christine Portell

My mother and I walked
along the churning shore
both of us barefoot, wearing
brightly colored cotton coverups.

We wondered about the deserted
beach, feeling strange and lucky
until the rain came,
washing us as million of drops
fell into the ocean.

A seagull squawked above us,
then dove into the water as
sandpipers scurried in our path.
My mother laughed aloud,
and I heard music more
beautiful than the sound of
waves washing up sea shells
like hundreds of tiny coins
falling together.



John Weston
no title
cut paper
7 inches x 9 inches

Degrees of Off-Red Clay Roses

Ryan Metcalf

Off-red is life,
Taken off either way.
The red that gets off
Black tarred school roofs
In the hot city summer,
Where heroes with hoses spray
The river's water
From their big red trucks
Onto the burning red roofs
And the sun dries it all out
Into that mud clay color.
Off-red,
Like the clay at the bottom
Of the Mighty Mississippi.
Hard enough to hold your breath,
With your face red
In the black river bottom.
Your ears pop,
You can't see parts of your mind
Go dark in concentration
And the red is there,
Too.
Back at the surface
With clay in your hand
Victorious,
Until you see it's not the off-red
You are looking for.
Then,
Like a naked nipple
Redding in the cold rain,
You go back down
With a red face
And a red set of ears.
Again.

The red that really isn't red,
But the red of a Bunsen Burner
Playing with orange
In the rebuilt city school;
Look close and
Watch your nose.
Off-red changes by degrees,
By the degree burn
On your nose
In chemistry class.
Just a little sore and bright.
Not the red of a second degree.
Where blisters form
And then go away,
That pop like the fights you get into
With the ones you love.
And not really third,
The worst degree,
Where the red isn't bright anymore
But black
And the nerves under the skin
Stay severed,
Just like the red hearted
Relationships
You never wanted to lose,
Now lost.
Red is a rose,
Which when given each time
Causes him to accidentally chip
Little red pieces of paint
Off the front door,
The knocker sends vibrations and
Peeling pieces fall
With the off-red brittle petals
That are dead,
He notices blood
From a pricking thorn,
And it stings his hand

Like the way love stops in
Unannounced,
Stays for a while,
And then leaves us feeling like
Blistered,
Off-red,
Sun dried,
Clay paint.
The door slams
And like true off-red feelings,
Pieces-n-petals fall the same way.
To the ground.



Mark Albrecht
photograph

Grandma's Last Figure

Ryan Metcalf

The cellar floor chilled my bare feet
Like water in a swimming pool on
Memorial Day weekend.
In the center of the cellar
The cement had cracked open in a hole.
The millions of cement particles
Had scattered to the shelves, and
In their place, holding things together
Was mud the texture of
The skin on a dead body,
Cold and just soft enough to
Leave a fingerprint in.

The insignificance of watching the
Fallen ice skater in her moment of glory
Had caused me to go down into
The cold old cellar to see if
Mother had kept my
First pair trainer Skates
In which I fell so many times.
They rested on one of
The dusty shelves just as they were since
Eleven years ago when
I took them off.
Now they too are covered by dust
And smell like grandmother's hair.
The blades are rusted and brittle
Like her old bones that broke
When she fell through the ice
And died in the lake.
Her skin was cold and brown afterwards,
And I remember seeing where the
Coroner had verified her death
Because of the faint fingerprints

He left on her neck.

Standing at the stair of the cellar
I reach up and turn off the memory
Of grandma's last figure.

Ghetto Snips
(Through the Eyes of a child)

Sharon Glenn

Miss Ann sent me to the store
for some napkins
My brother read the note.
Said I couldn't go.
All the time Momma upstairs crying.
Norman and them
under that braided willow tree
red milk carts in a circle
playing cards,
wine bottles,
empty
white castle boxes
on the ground
All the time momma upstairs crying.
Running through the grass
rat chasing the dogs
concrete burns my feet.
Johnny poured them water.
Gave me a quarter.
All the time momma upstairs crying.
Gang way wall scaling
Robert Crosby got a whipping.
Miss Vassey eating pigeons.
Kimbo cut her leg on an old rusty truck.
All the time momma upstairs crying.
Daddy still at work.
There's a booty in the sky
You a god damn lie
Brenda Kay can't come outside.
R. L. is in jail
and Hoeggs stole our push cart.
All the time momma upstairs crying.

Acolyte

Kellie White

Pastor, run fast
I thought I had killed
the flame – could even smell
the smoking wicks
but God's light is jumpy
today and my sleeve is on fire.
I'm burning down
the path from the altar,
walking the red carpet
that parts the congregation.

I'm going so fast
you'll have to hurdle
the rail to reach me
in time and hope
for wind
to fill your robe,
bring it to flight
black wings swooping
toward the light on my back.

Run fast, my white
robe is black too
and the heat is reaching
in, drying the healing
drops of faith
that might have saved
me. Run till you've struck
my back and swallowed
the flame. Hug your cloth
around my flesh
help it to heal – melt
it whole.



Byron Smith
photograph

Iguana Love

Kellie White

There was not room in the house for both
so she gave away her iguana
and got a husband

who will eat considerably more
than a few crickets
and soft fruits
from the bottom of the crisper

who will not contain his mess
to the cage in the spare bedroom
easily cleaned by removing
the dirtied newspapers

—56—

who will hold her softly
through the seasons
speaking with eyes
she understands

who will not slither
silent and alone
into the night.

Stone

Kellie White

The past is a stone
stubborn
and unforgiving.

Yesterday I kept it polished
among locket and keepsakes
but this morning tossed
it uncaring into a muddy
patch of ivy behind the house
wanting the vines
to strangle its presence.

Tonight I beat my head
with the burning rock
thinking of you.

Flowers

Daniel Hazleton

Calasandra wrote and said, "Come to me."
So in the seventh day of June in an unknown year
We went,
To shed a tear or two,
To remember friends and other times,
In another place, in another sphere.

The train, the giant, iron snake and old, was
Alive at first light, hissing along rails
Still wet with the dew,
Glistening with a polished poise,
That tons of dancing steel imposed.
That rails slither off into the sun
Carrying the message,
"She comes...she comes.....she comes.. ."

—58—

The little Japanese woman, with the small breasts,
And the perfect jet black hair,
Talked to herself at the piano,
Her lilting voice and supple fingers reintroducing...
Her fluid poise. Clattering china,
Passing shadows and shapeless hints
Of other conversations barely surrounded us.
Even the coffee was thin. Through the windows we saw
A boy, about the same age as my brothers were
When I first considered them to be pests.
He waved as we thundered past.
We could see him shout,
Trying to hear himself. Across the car sat
Two men muttering as they worried their danish,
Red filling oozing out over crisp, tan pastry,
Like dogs tearing apart another animal.
Rumpled suits and note pads, a young woman
With them but not, oblivious to their ramblings.

"...Classical mass...the theories that we use...."

She turns on one, a balding man with smeared glasses and
Hisses, "...can't see the world both ways at the same time."
As she leaves...her napkin trickles to the floor, a red blot on
the deep green carpet.

We pass through a town, slowly...
As if wary, or cautious,
Almost slow enough to read the names
On the weathered gray tombstones,
In the graveyard along the tracks.
There were angels everywhere, pale and vigilant,
And cold, so cold,
Under the lonely willows.
The old buildings seem
Haunted, almost grotesque in their decay.

Another black, iron snake passes, trumpeting
His win. A race against time that only he can end.
Blue smoke winds along our path,
Low to the ground, vivid. A smoke you could hide in,
If someone was after you, a serious hide and seek
If you could stand the stench of burned flesh,
Of the fear of something deadly waiting
To be inhaled with the smoke.
You could pass, hidden in the mist,
Just another shadow in the valley.

—59—

The woods seem dead as we roll by,
Wet and weary,...empty.
No leaves on the oaks or hickories,
Or piled on the mossy ground.
I tried to read,
But the swaying mesmerized me.
Swaying train, swaying trees,
The woman at the piano wears a mask,
Swaying, a glass of red wine in her hand.

Days float by as we wait,
And the nights seem too long.
We pass a tower, and hear the bells toll.
The old man behind me weeps.
"Too long," he cries. "It has been too long."
He spills his wine and the glass drops,
Rolls to a stop, then shatters, almost safe.
He moans, and moves his fingers
As if he were playing a song or petting a cat.

Clouds surround the station where we stop.
A torn jacket rides the dust across the tile floor,
Sleeves flapping in the wind as if it would fly.
A child sits and glances at the empty seat next to her
Wondering. Her eyes are too tired to cry.
Her arms limp, palms up, fingers curled.
She watches the garden across the way.
Filled with fragrant flowers,
On long green stems, bowing in the breeze.
Everywhere flowers, red flowers.
The red, the red; ohh, red blossoms like soldier's blood.
And on a pale stone pillar is a bronze plaque
With the words "In Memorium"
And a long list of names.
Men who gave their all for their country,
Who died in the war
And were forgotten.
For them we wept, remembering our dead
And their lives, and their pains, and their deaths.
And the reasons for their passing.
Then, only then,
Calasandra let us go.

Gray Eyes

Daniel Hazleton

Gray eyes,
Gray boat,
And cold gray water
Lapping at hull,
As I stand in the bow.

I remember...
Jim smiled
And laughed
And drank another toast
To the first mate,
His friends,
His brother,
His crew.

His gray eyes
Hot,
Full of life
His hat
Pushed back
And his sleeves
Rolled up
As he sat at the fire
And roared out his songs.

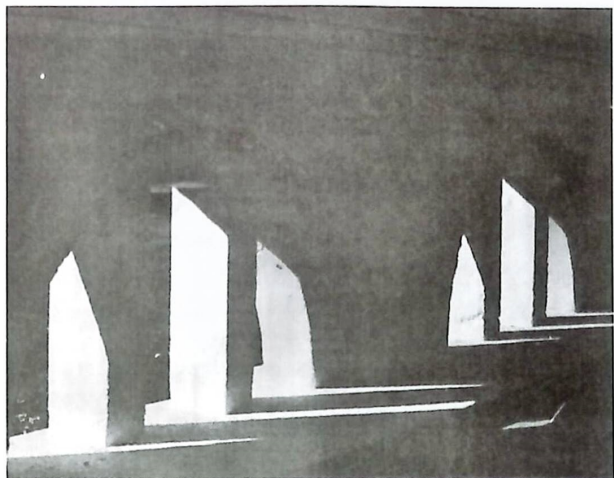
The whiskey
Burned his throat
Warmed his belly,
And tingled his fingers,
As the crew laughed
Together.

The storm
Had passed

And they were drunk,
But tonight they would sail
And fill their hold
With fish
For the American market.
Fish meal,
It stinks,
But it pays the bills.

I remember...
Three days
Of searching
Remembering
That smile,
That warmth,
That life,

Until I stood in the bow
And stare down
Into the cold water,
Into cold gray eyes.



Byron Smith
photograph

The Former Beauty

Margaret O'Connor

I. Ready

The former beauty turns a few greying heads
as she enters the bar.
Her skirt is tight and she's still not wearing underwear
because her mother told her
"always be ready." And she is,
though her husband hasn't touched her in months.
She waits,
folding her hair over and over with her hand
into her signature style.

II. A Coup

—64—

The former beauty is tan again this summer,
blonder and able to get into her thin jeans, too.
At the veterinarian's office
she sits with her golden retriever,
absently stroking his head and ears.
The young vet emerges to scan the waiting room
In her direction his gaze pauses,
a dancer suspended at the apex of his leap,
and moves on.

III. On the Street

A beautiful young man sits on the curb
outside the grocery.
The former beauty thinks for a moment
he might be a boy she dated a few times in college.
Oh, but that was more than twenty years ago,
so this could be his son.
Unnoticed, she watches him from her car.
He is waiting for the girl
with the blue tattoo
carelessly pricked onto the flawless skin
of her left shoulder.

IV. At the Reception

The former beauty is seated at the extra women's table.
Silently
she slides her thumb under the heavy necklace of rose quartz,
lifts the beads to her lips
and marvels at the warmth left from her breasts.

V. At the Mirror

The former beauty pulls at the sides of her face
and realizes she'll never wear flowers in her hair again.
No longer possible, the Fair Ophelia
mad with love and beautiful in madness.
Now she is Ophelia Dredged,
puffy and pale,
no longer in love
or mad.

VI. In the Yard

In her fat nephew's cast off shorts and tee shirt
the former beauty weeds the front flower bed.
The cool breeze brushes the sun's heat
from the back of her neck.
The sedum is the last thing in bloom.
She cuts her hand on a dry daylily leaf,
sucks the blood.
A car of teenaged boys drives by.
They honk, yell something.
She waves with her injured hand,
assumes she must know them from somewhere,
and returns to her day's work.

Gone Gone Gone

Margaret O'Connor

The scenery falls too fast
from this inexorable train;
pastures, houses,
signs unreadable,
license plates unidentified.
When did they tear that down?
People, too, moving,
twist themselves out of our arms
and run;
take the long, easy glide
from the sky
into that little pond,
there on the left,
gone;
even our dead,
bodies stilled,
are taken,
disposed of,
gone.
Speeding on,
our bodies rebel,
cramp,
tear
as if it were our own flesh
gone.

Obit

Margaret O'Connor

Passed through the fragile membrane
of time the famous woman sits on brocade
in 1950's Paris.

Her hair is a pyramid of pinned curls
and she holds a tortoise shell cat
whose eyes are round as bolts.

We own her now;
her face in all its years,
but the cat leaps down,
slips past,
nameless.

Through the Eye of A Needle

Hari Sky Campbell

In the market place of heat and shame,
gagging on a gnat and swallowing
a camel, standing where
souls are auctioned off
among men bargaining
for the beauty of a woman,
for sex taken behind
invisible dust curtains
of sin's sweet taste.

Blue Bedouins come
for water, wine, for
young maidens, breasts
heavy with passion, nipples
perfect, oval face onyx sensitive
to the touch of lips that tongue them,
nursing the dreams of lust hidden in
virgin wombs—

—69—

In games of love called chance,
in games of chance called life,
her tears like silver shine like
falling stars, floods her heart,
the thief cries for her shame yet
takes her—

Life slips through,
memories threaded
through the eye
of a needle,
knotted
at
the
end.



Andrea Swope
Mannequin
charcoal on paper
18inches X 24inches

The Inheritance

Spencer Hurst

Lincoln Atropos, Jr. pitched the wet pile of clothes into the yawning trunk of his father's car and slammed the lid. The trunk lid was big, heavy, and the sound of it shutting went off like a cannon in his already pounding ears. Nervously wiping his hands on the clean jeans he had hastily pulled on, he moved quickly to the car door and got in. Wiping the sweat from his forehead on the sleeve of his faded workshirt, he fired up the engine of the '67 Ford Galaxy 500 and headed toward the open highway at the outskirts of the city. The car warmed slowly to the idea of accelerating, hemorrhaging leaded fuel into a wide open carburetor, burning like napalm in the Mekong Delta.

Once out on the highway, his breathing began to calm a bit. He let his eyes wander lazily across the massive hood of the car, falling off the edge to pick up the yellow lines disappearing beneath the ravenous chrome grill. Link shared the summer darkness with the moths floating indifferently in the air ahead, waiting their turn to demonstrate inertia on his speeding windshield.

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He absently watched the screaming billboards flying by: Jesse James' Hideout, Loot Rock, Stuckey's (famous for pecan logs), Walnut Bowls, fluorescent-lettered promises of authentic rubber Injun arrowheads and countless other hillbilly gag gifts. He began remembering his favorite: a butt-naked hillbilly with a monumental pecker on a spring, the fantastic phallus held in check by a whiskey barrel hanging by suspenders from his wooden shoulders. Lift the barrel and you're faced with a dick like a Louisville Slugger. Link began to remember his father catching him in that forbidden part of the store, how he grabbed him by the arm, squeezing, hard. Link shook his head and tried to stop thinking.

Link wasn't sure how long this drive would take, having made the last trip twenty years ago. His father had been the driver then, in this same Galaxy; he would not be making this drive again. He wasn't even sure if Grandma Hattie would still be there, or whether

she was alive or dead. After a few miles, Link pulled off at a Fina station and picked up a six-pack of beer. It was only a few more miles until he could get off the state roads and into the country.

Once off the highway, Link poured the old car down the throat of a gravel road so overgrown with trees and weeds that he wondered if there'd be any paint left on it after he got to the farm. The road finally coughed him out into the familiar clearing. Even in this penetrating darkness, he recognized the darker shapes looming in the blackness all around.

There, to his left, was Hattie's old house. No light shone, as always, though he could feel her presence there, waiting. He suspected she'd heard him coming the past ten minutes, the gravel popping from the Galaxy's tires an unmistakable warning of an approaching intruder. He could feel her up there, inside, scouring the darkness through her bleary eyes. She only used the oil lamp when visitors came, and they usually had to light it themselves.

Further down the clearing Link saw another dark shape hunched at the edge of the thick, murmuring woods. This was the guest house, the one he'd been to so many times before. As a boy, that place was a teeming with hidden horrors, and he hated it even from this distance. He couldn't remember a time when the beds weren't full of rat shit and brittle wasp's wings.

Killing the engine, he left the big headlights beaming toward the front porch of Hattie's house. The porch was cluttered with the accumulated crap of decades: old washboards, a wringing machine, benches and rocking chairs with tattered, moth-eaten cloth hanging off like confetti, rusty wire, tractor parts, and a Coca-Cola thermometer stuck at 95 degrees Fahrenheit. No sign of Hattie.

Jumping over the rotted steps to avoid a sprain, he landed on the porch and stepped carefully through the maze of junk to the bent screen door. As he lay his hand on the loose handle, she appeared like a fog on the other side of the screen. "I've been expecting you," she said, in a strange, whirring voice, a sound resulting from years of disuse and ninety years of living. "I'm thirsty," she said through glistening gums which had not known the company of teeth in over thirty years. She opened the door to let him in and held out her bony hand.

His childhood memory clicked and he reached into the brown bag and handed her a cold Budweiser. Even as a young boy he knew Grandma's thirst could only be quenched by a cold beer or two. "You know how this helps my stomach," she said in exactly the same way she had said it twenty years ago. He opened one for himself, set down the bag and began fumbling with the old oil lamp. Striking a match, Link touched it to the old wick and teased the lamp to life. turning the rusty, serrated knob, he kept the flame low in deference to Hattie's delicate eyes.

"You know these cold drinks do my old stomach a world of good," she said once again, startling Link with how quickly she had downed the first beer. he handed her another and walked to the refrigerator to deposit the rest. As he opened the door, he cringed as a hundred fat cockroaches darted for cover in the instant daylight of the refrigerator light. Link cursed himself for forgetting this childhood detail, one he never quite got used to. Hattie's vision had always been dismal and she never even saw the detestable creatures which called her old Norge refrigerator home. The roaches happily shared her meager food supply, and sadly, they were Hattie's only real companions during all those years in that forgotten clearing. Link remembered there were a few relatives scattered throughout those forgotten hills, and they used to bring food and provisions to Hattie every week or two. the sight of the roaches made him wonder how long it had been since any of them had checked on her. For all Link knew, they might have all died years ago. He wondered how she'd been surviving.

Sealing the bag's mouth tightly around the beers, he placed them lightning-quick on the bare shelf and slammed the door shut, plunging the crisp black creatures back into the familiar embrace of cold, pitch darkness. Turning around, Link took the first long look at Hattie in two decades. A black hair net pressed her dirty grey hair down tightly, the elastic band digging into her wrinkled forehead. Link knew that hairnet hadn't been off her head in weeks, perhaps even years. Her glazed eyes wandered aimlessly, unable to focus on anything, searching in vain for his voice.

She sipped her beer and Link watched a satisfied grin cause her thin lips to part hideously. Her dress was a tattered, faceless cloth,

disturbingly like the rags hanging from the furniture on the front porch. "I'm going to shut off my headlights Grandma," Link sputtered, suddenly feeling the urge to get a breath of fresh air. "It'll only take a minute."

Swinging the old screen door again, he could see the big, bubble-eyed headlights shining brightly onto the porch. Carefully negotiating the maze of accumulated garbage once more, he reached the top of the crumbling stairs and leaped to the ground.

Facing the gaping grill for the Galaxy, Link examined the carnage. Nearly every open space in the grill was choked with the mangled, twitching bodies of moths. Stepping closer he noticed there were no rare or unusual species, just a sea of common, dusty brown moths.

He reached out to touch one whopping specimen, its body bent in half, disappearing back-first through a hole in the grill, head folded down toward its abdomen. Suddenly the moth surprised Link by grabbing hold of his fingertip with its feathery legs. Startled that the moth still lived, Link involuntarily jerked his hand back, neatly ripping the moth's legs from their sockets.

—74—

Bringing the fingertip up to his eyes, Link strained to see the tiny legs still dangling, shining in the glare of the Galaxy's lights. He couldn't help thinking he had much in common with the little beast, always clinging desperately to the wrong things, clinging with all his might, only to have the object of desire recoil, unexpectedly. Link wondered how many more pairs of legs he could afford to lose.

The thought made his stomach churn, and he slapped his hand across his faded jeans, rudely brushing away the lifeless legs of the doomed moth. By now, a large congregation of moths had come sleepwalking out from the deep woods to meet new lovers in the glow of the headlights. They moved like maple syrup in the cooling air, bumping into one, then another, returning again to those bumps which felt good.

These were not like the moths on the highway, the highway was where they flew when they'd had enough, when they'd thrown in the towel. These were the ones where desire still burned, where life still held promise. Suddenly, a swarm of wings beat right in his ears. He remembered Hattie inside the house, fancied he could

hear her swallowing beer, thought he even heard the scratching of the cockroaches on the brown paper bag in the fridge. He moved quickly to the open car window, reached in, and pushed the flat knob of the headlight switch with the palm of his hand.

Slowly his mind accepted the unmistakable reality of pitch darkness in the country, lit only by churning constellations, whose light sputtered at the edge of the dark treetops all around. Link could just make out the cloud of moths beginning to drift; some toward the highway, others back toward the woods. For some, the highway would have to wait for another night.

The moon had not yet risen and the blackness was stifling. Link began stepping back toward the porch, taking high, exaggerated steps to prevent tripping on rocks or branches. At the porch, he noticed the crickets had stopped; thick silence seeped from the mute earth. He had an overwhelming urge to be back in the wavering circle of light from the oil lamp. Fixing his eyes on the faint glow from the screen door, he loudly crossed the darkened porch, banging and cursing each relic he encountered along the way.

Once back in the shack, he pulled a rickety old chair up to a table hidden beneath a filthy red-and-white checked tablecloth. He looked carefully at Hattie now, wondering if she'd ask about her son. Link had never been to the farm without his father before. The look on her face belied any hint of coherence or even sanity, any connection to the outside world seemed to have died in the rustling corner of her dark house. Link began to relax.

—75—

He watched as she buried the bottle in her puckered hole of a mouth, watched her neck quiver horribly as the beer bubbled down her throat. Setting the empty bottle down, Hattie turned her head slowly, like a praying mantis, facing Link with an odd smile at the corner of her leather lips. "He's dead, isn't he?" she croaked. Link fought to remain calm, took another sip from his beer, racking his tired mind for a plausible reply. Before he could speak, Hattie fixed him with a stare from her suddenly clear, dark eyes and said, "just like the rest of the men in my life." Link then remembered Hattie had outlived all five of her husbands. He had always been afraid to ask Hattie about those husbands, all those funerals. Still

staring at him, Hattie said, "Come on, the time has come for me to show you something."

Link was still reeling from the strangeness of Hattie's words and the inexplicable clarity in her eyes when she got up nimbly from the table, spitting back over her shoulder at him, "You better bring that lamp if you want to make it back in one piece." By the time he picked up the lamp and took a step toward the screen door, Hattie was already out on the pitch dark porch.

Hattie crossed the cluttered porch without touching a thing, and Link could swear she did it without even glancing down once at her feet. In fact, he couldn't even be sure her feet touched the floor as she moved quickly to the edge of the porch and jumped off. Even with the oil lamp in hand, Link still managed to bang his knees on several rusty old bins and shelves on his way across the porch. He was amazed at Hattie's sudden mobility. Link struggled to follow Hattie's fleeting shadow as she moved quickly through the long, wet grass ahead of him. They soon came upon the dreaded guest house, but Link was relieved to see Hattie kept on the through the clearing without hesitation.

—76—

The dim light from the flickering lamp barely reached Hattie's tiny form as she stopped briefly at the edge of the woods, calling back at him "C'mon Link, we're almost there!" Once more Link was chilled by the odd twinge to Hattie's voice, a sound like the scratching of those cockroaches on the paper bag. Ignoring his fears, Link plunged on, quickly covering the last few yards of the clearing and ducking to avoid the branches of wild, untouched oaks.

Listening intently, Link could not hear Hattie's feet on the rotting leaves of the forest floor. Moving slowly forward, he began to make out the dim outlines of another clearing up ahead. Pulling the last few branches aside, Link held the lamp out into a rough circle of grass surrounded by towering cedars, their thick branches swallowing any hint of wind in the air.

Stepping into the circle, Link saw Hattie sitting squat-legged on a large grey stone in the center of the clearing. The rock was jagged, uncut, clearly unlike anything in the surrounding landscape. As he approached, the oil lamp lit her face from below, accentuating each crease in her cheeks and forehead. When Link

finally reached the rock, Hattie's face looked down on his from a height of about ten feet, and he looked in vain for any steps which might have aided in climbing up to her present perch. When she opened her mouth to speak, its black wetness made Link nauseous.

"You killed him!" boomed from her black mouth, "just like I killed all the others!" Link dropped the lamp, igniting the grease at the base of the huge stone. His mind flailed at the sides of his skull while his hands waved like bat's wings in the stifling air of the windless clearing. How could she have known he wondered, unable to move his eyes from Hattie's. He then noticed her eyes were fixed at a spot below his left front pants pocket. Looking down, he could see a dried, brown spot where he'd carelessly wiped his hands after throwing his bloody clothes into the trunk of the Galaxy. On the very same spot, he could also make out the tiny threads of the moth's legs, the one that had grabbed him from the car's front grill. Raising his eyes once again, he could see her slowly shrinking, the edges of her tattered dress blurring.

In a moment her transformation was complete, and Link gaped at the moth as it lifted itself up from the rock now awash in flaming grass. The moth rose on warm currents from the flames, rising toward the open sky above, where the moon was just beginning to climb over the tops of the cedars. As the moth cleared the treetops, Link tried to scream, but the scream died in his throat as his tongue touched his toothless gums, his hands gripped his forehead, feeling the unmistakable lie of the hairnet digging in.

Talk to me

Spencer Hurst

I.

Your naked back heaving below me
grants permission to speak,
smiling at the inside of your eyelids
you surrender –
I tremble.

II.

The coroner in my dream
says I stabbed my own heart
38 times
(I don't know, wasn't
counting, but
my arm is still sore)
I sentence myself to life
in what's left of it,
peering from the first hole I made,
like some wretch in an egg
hatched by Hieronymous Bosch.

III.

Your eloquent tongue
commands my nipples to rise
from the floor of a dead sea –
they obey.
I watch from below
afraid of mirages,

listening for the doomed Doppler drone
of the rescue plane
gone by –
its propellers patiently chewing air.

IV.

Your breath melts down
the vestigial hair on my thighs,
far away in my blood
I hear you say
talk to me.

The Truth About Cool Women

Deborah Bowman

We women who claim to be cool
can still catch our breath
at a man's narrowed eyes;
We who teach our children
that God frowns when they curse
can still shiver to hear the words
whispered in the dark;
We who check ourselves carefully
for smeared lipstick or untucked blouses
can still lose our self-cultivated composure to see
muscles pumped and glistening, or to feel
the scratch of beard against our thighs.

It is this that makes us drop
our children's hands and wonder
whether salvation is worthwhile;
It is this that causes the hum
you hear late at night--
when stars glide in their set patterns,
then fall from grace;
when Lord Shiva celebrates
the rhythm of the universe
by dancing the dance of Creation.

Searching For My Father

Deborah Bowman

Maybe it was the DDT you spread on the fields,
Or the high-voltage wires you could see from your kitchen
window,
Maybe the radon that sent its invisible tendrils
through the floor of the ancestral mansion,
Or the occasional cigarette that left its souvenir black in your
lungs--

We can guess forever.
But the sudden and unexpected onset of your final disease
left the rest of us gasping for air.
And in the autumn,
when I returned to look for traces
of you, I found, as I knew I would
bits of you tucked into every corner--
your sharp scent clinging to your coveralls where they still - \$1 --
hung in the basement,
an antique coffee grinder you'd saved from your father, on a
shelf in your shop,
kick marks on the garden gate from your work shoes,
the rhododendrons and roses you'd weeded and watched
over,
the rusted-out bells you'd fastened around Lightning's neck
when you hitched him to the pony cart to take us for a ride.

As I gathered the memories into a heap,
my stomach twisted into grape-tight knots
and I closed my eyes to conjure you.
But all I could see there
was DDT
high-voltage wires
radon
cigarettes

Carol's Heart

Donna Meixner

You wrapped it in your favorite satin scarf
and placed it carefully in a box.
Even though it had gone days
without food. "I don't know what to
do with it," you said.

We buried your canary in the courtyard
near midnight under the maple.
I dug a hole in the wet earth
with a silver spoon the size of a spade.
I found a spot behind a root
where even the darkness couldn't reach.
Like the place your husband had called from
to tell you of his discovery, to tell you
that he wasn't coming home.

—82—

I dug that hole wide and hollow
like the place in your heart
that you spoke from
when you told me
you were too busy to take care
of anything.

We pushed in the dirt
We promised never to search again
for your satin scarf
or our shadow stricken faces
in the courtyard,
in the darkness,
where we pressed in the dirt
around him.



David Spear
no title
ceramic sculpture
16 inches x 6 inches x
6 inches

Learning

Donna Meixner

This is my photograph of you
in Alaska.
You are leaned back
against the cool, painted metal
of the train.
You are wedged
in that small space
in-between cars.
Your hair is a twirl of white
about your kicked-back head.
There are puffy wrinkles of sleep on
your laughing face.
Denial is rushing in your eyes.
The mountain was

—84—

swelling underneath us.
I have this photograph of you
in Alaska, where the wilderness is a
blur of frank foliage and
summer solstice behind you,
where we stretched out our legs onto
one anothers' seats,
where I learned you well enough to tire of
you.

I keep this photograph of you
from Alaska, when our
politeness wore thin
and I turned away
only to come back to you again.



Derek Simmons
photograph

The Death of Me Yet

Julie Earhart

"Yes, Officer, I was the one who found the body."

"No, Officer, I didn't kill-- what was it, a man or a woman?"

"No sir, I didn't kill her."

"I was looking for my mitten when I saw it."

"No, first I saw that big red stain in the snow I told you about."

"I don't know. I just figured some kid had spilled his Kool-Aid or something."

"Yeah, well, that's what I thought at first."

"Then I saw it-- I mean her. You did say it was a her, didn't you, Officer?"

"Well, I can't really remember if I started yelling for help first or ran up to her first and then started yelling. Uh, can I bring that trashcan over here, Officer, I, uh, I think I'm going to throw up."

"Yes, I'd appreciate a glass of water."

"Okay. I'm ready now. Can I start over? I need to start over."

—86—

"When I saw it-- I mean her. I was walking down the sidewalk-- at least I think it was the sidewalk. With all that snow it was hard to say-- looking for my mitten. Then I saw a big red stain on the snow. Then I saw it-- I mean her. Then I ran over to it-- I mean her-- and then I saw, started yelling for help. Yeah, I remember now. I ran up to her, and when I saw what had happened, I started yelling."

"What happened? I don't know how it-- I mean her-- I mean I don't know how she got there, officer, I just know what I saw."

"It was so gross, there was blood everywhere. And her head was lying about two feet from the rest of her body."

"It was awful, Officer, I bet I have nightmares about this forever."

"No, she wasn't wearing any clothes. Had a nice figure though, firm breasts--"

"I did not touch them! I wouldn't do that! They just looked like they would be, that's all!"

"I forgot it was a woman! I forgot a lot of things! I just forgot. That's all. You made me remember."

"You're confusing me!"

"No, I never saw her before."

"There weren't any panties in my coat pocket."

"Well, they don't belong to me."

"I don't wear girl's clothes."

"I did not ask for sex!"

"The last time I had sex? I cannot remember."

"I think it was right before I went into the hospital last time."

But I'm not sure."

"I CAN'T REMEMBER!"

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to yell. You're making me nervous."

Can I have another cup of water?"

"Thanks. Okay, I'm better now. I just forgot it was a woman until you had me remembering. That's all, Officer. Honest, I just forgot."

"Please don't make me remember anymore."

"I was so scared. All that blood and stuff. Of course as soon as I saw it- I mean her- I knew it wasn't Kool-Aid; it was blood. It's only logical, and there was so much of it. So much. I didn't know people had that much blood in 'em."

"What? I'm sorry, Officer, but I feel really weird right now. Like I'm floating on a cloud or something. Or maybe just lying on one. But I kinda like it. It feels good- in a perverted sort of way. I'm not perverted in any way; I'm not. Don't get the wrong idea about me. I just feel really weird right now. Maybe I took too much of my medication again. Sometimes I can't remember if I've taken it or not, so I take it again. Usually I have, and then I feel weird like this. So I must have."

"Prozac. Fifty milligrams twice a day."

"About eight months."

"Lots of different things, lithium, thorazine, but Prozac seems to work the best. Everyone says they've noticed the difference. Or maybe I just ate too much Mexican food last night. My mouth just loves spicy foods, but my stomach, well, my stomach hates Mexican food and usually rebels. I was surprised I didn't throw up; I usually do when I eat Mexican food, but it's just so good going down. Or did I have those nachos for lunch? That's funny, I can't

remember when I ate last. I try never to miss a meal. Plays havoc with my medicine, ya know?"

"I'm sorry Officer, would you repeat that?"

"Start at the beginning. Oh, okay."

"I don't remember much till I was on my way to work, and I was feeling strange. Kinda like I do right now. It was weird. I didn't think I was really outside; I thought I was having a dream or something. There was nothing but whiteness. Like that time I was caught in that blizzard in Michigan. It was really scary."

"Yeah, I know that I was outside. The other officer told me. This is the second blizzard I've been caught in. Bet that doesn't happen to many people, huh?"

"Upper Peninsula."

"1983. Or maybe it was '84. I can't really remember, although you'd think that a person would remember when they were trapped in a blizzard, huh? I got a feeling that blizzards are gonna be the death of me yet."

"Oh, I'm sorry, Officer. I was taking a shortcut through Central Park, hurrying a little slower than usual toward my job at the art museum, trying to watch the teeny-tiny snowflakes drift through the tree limbs. I could've enjoyed it better if I hadn't overslept that morning, but let's face it. I'm just not a morning person. On good days it takes me a good half hour to drag my bones from beneath the cover, and on bad days, when I'm not feeling very good, well, I don't make it up at all. Sometimes I can't even call the museum, but they understand. It was part of the deal."

"The hospital worked it out with them. I do my job as best I can, but I can't always make it in. They're nice people; they understand."

"The longest? Let me think. The longest I can ever remember staying in bed is six days. But the Prozac helps; it really does. I haven't missed a day since I started taking it. Well, except for today, and I just got lost, what with the snow and all."

"Sorry, I have a tendency to ramble. There I was in the park, the snow starting to fall, and, ya know the weirdest part, I didn't see another living soul. No one was in the park but me and the snow. It was strange 'cause you and I both know that New Yorkers never let a little bit of snow stop 'em. So that was really spooky. Not

even the squirrels were hanging around for leftovers. I started walking a little faster 'cause I was scared of being alone like that and 'cause if you're in the park too long, you stand a good chance of getting mugged."

"Me? I've only been mugged six times in the four years I've lived here. Not bad considering I cross the park at least twice a day. I bet that—"

"The last time? About six months ago, I think. Yeah, six months. I remember 'cause I was wearing—"

"No, it really doesn't make me mad. Nobody has ever hurt me though. If they hurt me, I might get mad."

"No, I wasn't mad at that woman. She didn't do anything to hurt me. If she had hurt me, I'd remember her."

"I never saw her before I saw her lying there in the snow."

"Well, I can't help it if other people have seen her walking in the park every morning. I never have. I try to mind my own business."

"No, she didn't try to mug me."

"No, she didn't ask if I wanted to have sex with her."

"I just told you I never saw her before."

"Oh okay. Well, the snow started falling faster and faster and the flakes were getting bigger and bigger. The wind had picked up too, whipping little pieces of ice that were mixed in with the snow right into my face. Wouldn't ya know that was the one day I forgot my scarf?"

"That looks like my scarf. But it's not."

"I forgot it."

"It was lying on the ground beside her?"

"I have a confession to make, officer. I didn't really forget my scarf. Jupiter, that's the cat who lives upstairs in old lady Benson's apartment, was sleeping on it, and that overweight hairball hates me so much that he spits at me whenever I get too close, so I just let him finish his nap."

"No, it's not mine. But can I have it if nobody else claims it? That way I wouldn't have to worry about ol' Jupiter getting cat hair all over it. I'm allergic to cat hair. Funny thing though, Jupiter is old lady Benson's cat, but she don't claim it. She says Jupiter belongs to the universe. Me I say Jupiter belongs to her if she feeds it— I don't know if that ol' cat is a boy or a girl, so I just call it

an 'it.' Personally, I think that she told Jupiter to hate me like she does. She always looks at me funny because of the voices."

"Well, sometime I hear voices, and if I forget where I am, which happens a lot, I talk back. I know it makes people uncomfortable, but it's just that I forget that other people don't hear 'em"

"It's been awhile. I really think it's the Prozac, officer. It sure seems to help."

"The museum? I work in the basement so I usually don't see anybody. That was part of the deal, too."

"They didn't want me bothering people. In case I forgot where I was."

"No, I don't mind. It's kinda lonely though. And its dark. I hate it when Ken--"

"The night security guard. When he turns out the light and it's dark when I get down there."

"Yeah, I know its sissy, but I'm scared of the dark."

"Bad things happen in the dark."

"Very bad things."

—90—
"Okay, like I was saying, that big 'ol cat was curled up on my scarf, and I didn't know it was supposed to snow or I would've maybe tried to get it. Anyway, by the time I reached the entrance to the zoo, I could barely see my hand in front of my face. My heart was beating so hard I swear I could see my coat moving. My palms were sweating through my mittens. I stopped to catch my breath and check my pulse. A little faster than normal, but the hardness of the pounding started to worry me. I could be having a heart attack!"

"No, I've never had a heart attack, officer, but I read about it happening to a guy in Montana. His heart started beating real hard, then real hard and fast – just like mine was doing–while he was in the woods. And he died."

"No, I'm not afraid of dying; in fact, I'm ready for it. I tried to go a couple of times, but I guess heaven just wasn't ready for me. But I don't think I'll try it again though. There are still a lot of things I want to do."

"Well, I would like to have a girlfriend and go to college, and write a play, and go to Ohio and Paris and discover a Da Vinci beneath some of that God-awful stuff in the pop-art collection and

learn Hungarian. Mom- God rest her soul- said that my dad came from Hungary in the mid-fifties but was deported about two weeks before I was born."

"My dad was a Communist?"

"Oh I'm sorry. I thought that you said that he was."

"I never did think to ask her why until after she was dead, then it was too late."

"We tried to find him off and on while I was growing up but we never got a reply. Mom always supposed he was dead."

"The hospital said they sent a message to the Red Cross when Mom died, but if they found him, I never heard from him."

"Nah, I don't think I'll try to find him."

"If he didn't want me before he even knew me, I'll bet you a hundred dollars he won't want me now."

"Well, I'm not exactly, ah, normal, ya know."

"Okay. So, there I was, alone, in the middle of Central Park, my heart galloping like a race-horse, barely able to see, the snow whirling and swirling around me, the wind howling around my ears, thinking I was having a heart attack. I couldn't remember what to do. Should I run toward the street, or should I just lie down right there and wait for it to pass? I was pretty sure that lying down would be certain death- I can't die just yet; I just told you how much I have left to do- so I took off in the direction of Fifth Avenue, but somewhere I managed to take a wrong turn, and I kept heading deeper and deeper into the park. The snow was coming down faster and faster and starting to pile up on the sidewalk, the benches, and what was left of the grass. It kept sticking to my eyelashes and melting in my eyes so I lowered my head. That was a mistake 'cause then I didn't see the missing section of concrete until I tripped, tearing my jeans and scraping my knee. That's how I must have lost my left mitten."

"You found it? Great! Can I have it back? Look at how chapped my hand is. I have very sensitive skin, officer, and just being out in that storm chapped my poor little hand."

"Well, I don't know how the dead lady got a hold of it. Maybe she found it and picked it up and was gonna keep it for herself."

"Maybe she was trying to put it in on the wrong hand when whoever killed her did it to her. She could have been real stupid,

officer. You don't know if she was smart or stupid, do you, officer?"

"Oh no, I wasn't implying anything."

"The other marks? What other marks? I didn't see any other marks, officer."

"I don't know what stab wounds look like."

"Like giant cigarette burns? That's odd, don't you think, officer? How many were there?"

"SIXTY-FIVE!"

"That's something I'd like to ask you about Officer. Why would anyone stab somebody that many times when only once or twice would do?"

"Well, yeah, there was that incident at the hospital the last time I was there."

"But he made me mad. I'm telling ya, officer, I don't hurt nobody unless they make me mad."

"He peed all over my paints."

"I stabbed him."

"It was only a butter knife, officer. He didn't even bleed."

—92—

"No, that's not all. First he told Dr. Traflagar that I really wasn't doing as well as it looked, that I was only acting."

"Dr. Traflagar didn't believe him."

"Jealous I guess. 'Cause I was getting out early. I was supposed to stay until the end of the month, but they were going to let me out a week early."

"Dr. Traflagar said I was really doing better than he expected."

"That's what he told me. That and something about the insurance money."

"No, I don't own any pruning shears, but old lady Benson has a pair in the basement of the apartment building."

"That's them. How did you get them?"

"They have blood on them? I don't think I've used 'em since July when I cut down that rosebush for her."

"Everybody who lives in the building can borrow them anytime they want."

"Oh, okay. Where was I."

"That's right. I had just fallen over that missing section of concrete, and my knee was really hurting. I could feel a small

trickle of blood inching its way down my leg. But I got up and kept on running— but it was more like limp—running. My knee was throbbing almost as hard as my heart was pounding. I still hadn't seen another person or even reached one of the Avenues, and I should have. No matter what, if you stay headed in one direction, you always come out of the park. But it seemed like I was just going in deeper and deeper and my heart was feeling like somebody had reached way down my throat, grabbed it, and was squeezing it like all get out. I was pretty sure I was going into cardiac arrest. Then I started getting dizzy and nauseous."

"But you said you wanted the whole story."

"Well, I thought the dizziness and nausea was from lack of oxygen, running like I was. Then I remembered that Uncle Larry— my mom's little brother, that's what she always called him, her little brother, even though he was in his sixties the last time I saw him."

"Let me think. It's been about two years I guess. Anyway, Uncle Larry told me when I was visiting him in intensive care that was how he felt when he was having—"

"Dizzy and nauseous. When he was having his heart attack. He's the only family member I have left, so I didn't mind the train ride to Florida to see him. And he told me all about it, in minute detail, 'cause I wanted to know since heart problems run on Mom's side of the family. The doctor said that there was only minor damage, but still he decided to retire early. He was some sort of CFO for a paint company down there. Mom always said he was lazy so his retiring didn't mean anything. I think it surprised Aunt Vivian—"

"Oh, okay. Well, I had it on pretty good authority what a heart attack felt like—"

"No, I don't remember any weird stuff happening to my heart in Michigan. But I think I had a blackout. I'm not real sure though."

"No I don't have seizures."

"No, no family history of seizures that I know of. I could check my mom's medical records. I still have them. I keep them in a—"

"Black outs? A couple."

"While I was in the hospital. It was while they were trying to get my medicine balanced."

"Okay. the snow was getting deeper, must have been an inch or so piled up there on the top of the trashcan. I got really scared when I saw that. I knew I wasn't in the park anymore, but I didn't know where I was."

"How did I know? You never see a trashcan in Central Park that has a lid. I'd stopped to look around, but all I could see was snow. Soft billowy snow. Sort of like I was in the middle of a gigantic marshmallow. I even felt sticky, but I think that was 'cause I was sweating so hard from the running. My armpits were wet, my mitten was completely soaked --- but I think a lot of that had to do with my falling earlier like I told you—and I could feel these two drops of sweat turtle racing down my spine."

"Turtle racing? That's just two drops of sweat going real slow, Officer. You know on those really --"

"Okay. Where was I?"

"Yeah. The trashcan lids. I started to get really scared 'cause I didn't know where I was. the snow was coming down so thick and hard that there weren't any spaces between the flakes. Sort of like a giant cotton bedsheet — like the ones they use at the hospital --
- was falling from the sky."

—94—

"I come and go. When the voices get really loud, I have to go back to the hospital until they shut up for a while. Let's see, I think it's been almost a year since I was there. And ya know, I really miss ol' —"

"Sorry. I told you I had a tendency to ramble, so I don't mind when you yell at me like that. My mom used to do it all the time. Just don't make me nervous; I can't remember when I get nervous."

"No, I don't get mad; I just can't remember."

"So, I decided to sit down for a while. I brushed the snow off the bench with my mittened hand and it was kinda hard since I'm left handed, but I didn't want to take my hand out of my nice warm jacket pocket. I chap real easy. So I sat there and tried to figure out were I was. I was just getting comfortable when I saw that man."

"I thought I told you about him before. Are you sure that I didn't?"

I'm sorry, I should have. Please don't yell at me. I can't remember if you yell at me. I'm so stupid sometimes. My mom always said it was 'cause I talk too much and I do ramble a —"

"He was wearing a blue coat and a stocking cap. He was walking real fast toward me. Boy, was I glad to see him. I yelled at him but it was like he didn't hear me. I figured that because of the wind and snow that he couldn't hear me. So I stood up to wait for him so I could ask him where was. People are usually pretty nice about telling me where I am. They look at me like they're scared of me though, and that's okay 'case I'm used to it."

"Sorry. Please don't yell at me. While I was waiting, I checked my pulse again. It seemed like it was almost back to normal. At least the pounding had stopped. And I didn't feel dizzy or nauseous anymore. And it was so weird, when I looked up he was gone."

"I DO NOT SEE THINGS!"

"I DON'T KNOW! HE JUST VANISHED INTO THIN AIR."

"I AM NOT GETTING UPSET!"

"Can I have some more water?"

"Thanks. Hey! Ya know something I just thought of? Maybe he killed her. He was headed in that direction."

—95—

"It was real weird. I thought maybe that I'd entered a twilight zone or something. Do you ever watch that show? It gives me the creeps."

"The man? What man?"

"Oh, him. Well, I thought maybe he was an angel, although not a very friendly one — or helpful for that matter."

"You don't believe in angles? Oh, pish-posh, Officer. How do you think we make it through the day without angels?"

"That's a great word, pish-posh, don't you think, Officer? Not one you hear much."

"Well, they're out there no matter what you think. I need to have a word with god about that."

"No, He never talks back."

"I don't know who the voices are, they've never said."

"I never thought to ask."

"Yeah, well. There I was, pretty certain that I wasn't going to die this time, and I was glad 'cause I have a lot —"

"Okay. So I started looking around, trying to figure out where I was. All there was was whiteness, like I told you about before, and I was starting to get cold."

"Yeah, that's odd, isn't it, Officer, that I hadn't noticed the cold before. but I had dressed really warm when I left my apartment. Maybe it was 'cause I had been sweating and with that cold wind whipping on it --"

"I'm trying to tell you what happened, Officer. You said you wanted the whole story and for me to start at the beginning."

"Well, I can't help it if I need to explain some things to you so that you'll understand."

"No I don't mean to imply you're stupid, Officer. You just don't know me that's all, and I want you to understand."

"I always tell the truth, Officer. Every time. I always get caught if I don't. Or I feel guilty. I always get caught when I lie. Like that time at the hospital when --"

"Fine. Where was I?"

"I was cold, and I was afraid my ears were getting frostbit, and I was lost, and I didn't know what to do. So I started walking back the way I came. I wanted to cry, but my mom taught me never to cry in public. I think that a pretty ---"

"No, she never let me play sports."

"She was always afraid that I'd get hurt."

"I wanted to. I wanted to be like the other guys, but Mom always said I was different."

"Yeah, I like girls."

"Not a steady girlfriend. Not like all the other guys had."

"All the girls laughed at me. They said I was weird and revolting. And besides, Mom wouldn't let me date."

"She said girls would take advantage of me and make me do things with them that was disgusting."

"I don't know."

"I didn't have sex until after Mom died."

"She would have been mad at me if I had."

"Of course not! She would never make me do that with her! She said it was disgusting!"

"MY MOM NEVER HAD SEX. SHE SAID IT WAS DISGUSTING!"

"Mom said the stork brings 'em."

"Yeah, I liked it. It felt good."

"Since then? Not very often."

"Women laugh at me."

"I don't know."

"I don't know."

"I DON'T KNOW."

"The first time? With a nurse at the hospital."

"Yeah, she laughed, but she said she didn't care."

"I felt bad afterwards, though. Mom would have been mad at me."

"I don't remember the last time. I think it was right before I went into the hospital the last time, but I'm not really sure."

"I told you I never saw that woman in the park before."

"Yeah, I guess she might have been pretty. I didn't really notice what with her head being chopped off like that."

"I might have wanted to."

"I was at work yesterday."

"I swear, Officer, I was there. Just call the museum; they'll tell ya."

"It's Friday, the 18th."

"Monday, the 21st? It can't be Monday. I do my laundry on Sundays and I don't remember doing it yesterday."

"I remember leaving my apartment for the museum and heading into the park. Strolling, I guess you'd call it."

"I didn't have any place in particular to be."

"Well, I sat down on the park bench and this really pretty woman walked by, so I said 'hi,' and she said, 'hi,' back. She had pretty red hair. Just like that woman I found in the park."

"We just talked."

"Just stuff. Ya know. The trees, what I do at the museum, how I like to spend my time."

"She said she had seen me there before."

"Yeah, I told ya, remember, I spend a lot of time in the park."

"Then she asked me if I wanted to go back to her place."

"I said no."

"She might want me to do something disgusting with her."

"I don't know."

"She just shrugged and we kept on talking."

"My stamp collection, and I told her all about how ol' Jupiter hates me, and she said she didn't like cats either and that she had a dog named Harold. I really like dogs. They're so much more fun than cats. then she asked me if I wanted to help her take Harold for a walk and I——

umsl faculty writers

Coup

Jennifer MacKenzie

"Write an essay about a turning point in your life," I had assigned.

They came for his father
at five o'clock. Wailing
woke the boy. the men
in khaki were dark like trees.
His father's white shirt
was a moon-blue shape
hustled through the gate.

*At noon all classes will
convene in the courtyard
for an official broadcast,*

Teacher read. The boys shuffled
squinting into the glare.
They sat in rows in the ash-
grey dust, faces turned
to the black speaker
high on the stucco wall.

-99-

A crackle of static: then
a voice like a dry pen
dipped in rusty ink.
They boy hugged his arms
around his shins. Names spilled
from the speaker, pooling
dark at the foot of the wall.
Cabinet members, the chief
of police. The boy
bowed his head to his knees.
His father's name. Tears
made clean brown circles

on his dusty knees.

A classmate called, *Teacher,*
look! He's crying!

A stir of dust. Teacher's
shadow moved cold across his neck.
We have cried for years,
Teacher said. *Let him cry.*

Walking over Wet Ground with a Hole in My Shoe

Scott McKelvie

Why do I do it when
I have a more sturdy
pair at home, when the road

near by and the parking
lot I cut across are
nearly dry? Only the soil

is wet, and only where
the matted patches of brown
and green cover the ground

imperfectly. The hole
is not large, nor worn through
completely, so the damp

—101—

seeps first into the sole
before soaking my sock
where the ball of the foot

meets the ground, and nowhere
else. Because this is the
most direct way, a habit

from colder mornings when
the earth was as hard as
the road, when snow cover

and icy wind and heavy
boots made the question moot.
Because every footfall

on concrete stings the soles
of my feet. Because the

dampness on a mild day,

even in February,
almost makes me believe
it's spring.

Group Home

Mary Troy

It all started when I fell for a do-gooder, Richard, whom I met on Wakiki Beach on a Sunday afternoon as I was working on getting the backs of my legs tanned. Not far from where I lay was a Samoan-looking guy wearing jeans, a holey black sweater, and sneakers with the toe ends cut out. He sat in the sand with his legs straight out before him and shouted, "Tear me up, Cowboy," "Shoot me dead, Daddy," and other gibberish to those of us near by. We all ignored him. All but Richard, that is. Richard walked down from the snack bar, walked with a precise stride – careful not to kick sand on anyone's towel – and his freckled shoulders and the sun-whitened hair fanning out from his earnest face made him seem saint-like even then, in spite of being in his tight maroon briefs. The two talked for a while, and finally Richard took from his shoulder bag what he told me later was a twenty dollar bill and put it in the Samoan guy's hand. The guy just wadded it up and popped it into his mouth, but chewing it quieted him and gave Richard a chance to notice my smile.

—103—

Richard was a social worker for Oahu Social Services, and as such, worked long irregular hours, often evenings and weekends, earning, of course, far less than I did as a designer for Kakua Fashions. As I could have predicted, Richard said there were rewards more important than money, and hearing him say it, I could almost believe it. Most of my friends were assistant managers or future health care administrator types. Like me, they were graduates of the very la-di-da Punahou High School or some other such producer of highly evolved white people. They had gone to some expensive mainland college, again, like me, and they always remembered to give their fair share to the United Way. A week earlier I had been involved in a discussion of whether condos were sensible investments. So being with Richard, someone who had been brought to Hawaii at ten with his divorced mom who waitressed at the big pink hotel behind us on the beach, someone who had gone to a public high school, then to the state university, someone who wanted to make others' lives better, was refreshing.

At twenty-five, my life was flattening out. Goodness, I thought might be what I needed.

I didn't waste any time, either. Right after our first date, I signed up as a volunteer with Richard's agency, and that was how I ended up eating one TV dinner lunch a week with three people who lived together because they were no good alone.

I worked Tuesdays through Saturdays at Kakua Fashions, designing dresses and play clothes we sold mainly to Japanese honeymooners. I also modeled. I am *hao/e*, but my dark hair and olive skin gives me a vague Polynesian look, so I sometimes stood in the window of our shop wearing one of my tapa-print halters. I spent Sundays on the beach and visited the group home on Mondays. Almost immediately, the inhabitants of the home became the underpinning of Richard's and my romance, what I talked about before I tickled the inside of his thighs and he giggled like a roly-poly child.

The three were Levi - a fifty year old local, a tough guy sort when younger, a *Moke*, with an obsession for closed drawers and doors --- Vicky --- a hunchbacked seventy-six year old Chinese stroke victim - and Evelyn - a thin thirtyish, wide-eyed, strawberry-blond. Richard told me that prior to being moved to the home, Levi had been so reclusive, he would let only his mother in his apartment, and then only if she brought bean soup and Hershey bars. Eventually, he refused even her, made her leave the food outside his door. Richard said Vicky had been raised on a sugar plantation, married young, had two children who moved to California, and about a year ago had had a series of strokes which made her speech unintelligible and her left arm useless. He said Evelyn's husband, a man thirty years her senior, had locked her in a closet at their beach house and then boarded a flight to New Zealand. Evelyn was in the closet for three days, finally discovered by the woman who came in once a week to clean. After that, she took to spending large chunks of times in that same closet. She would take her phone in, too and send people she didn't know all over the island to pick up their prizes at radio stations, claim their free dinners for two at the Surf Room.

I often told Richard I felt good helping the three, but I knew I wasn't helping at all. The social workers, therapists, nurses, may

have been helping, but all I did was nod and smile and not really listen as we ate previously frozen food. I pretended they were my friends, that I had stopped in for lunch because I liked them, but I knew they would have been as well served by a smart and friendly mynah bird.

On my fifth Monday, I was late. They were already sitting at the dining room table when I arrived. Levi wore, as usual, just a border-design *lava lava* tied around his waist and covering him to mid-thigh. His smooth brown stomach hung over the wrap-around as he sat hunched at his plate, already half-finished with his Salisbury steak and whipped potatoes. Vicky stared morosely at her chicken dinner. Evelyn picked at turkey and dressing. And a lukewarm breakfast, eggs and something like sausage, had been set out for me. They had heated it by mistake, Evelyn said, and someone had to eat it. "It's all right," I said as pleasantly as I could. "I like eggs."

"Consider yourself lucky," Evelyn said. "You get one free meal a week here. You've got no room to complain."

"I'm not," I said and smiled while chewing the gummy eggs. I looked across at Vicky's liver-spotted face, and Evelyn said, "She's been depressed like that all day."

—105—

So I did what I always did, the only thing I knew. I resorted to compliments. I told Vicky I liked her dress, really a rose-colored housecoat. Vicky continued to stare quietly at her meal.

"It's not very appetizing is it?" I said, and noticed Levi look at me quickly. He was scrapping the last bit of potato off his plate.

"She's just sad," Evelyn said, "because life is sad. I wonder sometimes how I manage to get up in the mornings, keep going, why I don't just give up like Vicky."

I smiled at Evelyn and tried another approach with Vicky. "Is it true you were raised on a plantation?" She nodded but did not look up. "Did you live there after you were married?"

"Hah!" Evelyn said. "Don't talk to me about marriage."

I'm not, I thought, but said I was sorry and added for good measure that blue was a perfect color for her, though the blue she wore was a faded T-shirt with "Here Today Gone To Maui" barely visible across her chest. I addressed Vicky once again and asked

what I knew the answer to. "Was your husband from the plantation, also?"

"My husband was a turd," Evelyn said.

Vicky's lower lip twitched, and her face flushed. I suggested to Evelyn that we only talk about pleasant things. It would help our digestions, I explained.

"I've already had gas for two days," Evelyn said.

When I said too bad, she said Levi should have it, too, by rights, and I turned and watched him make one bite out of his piece of German chocolate cake. Evelyn continued talking about her being the only one in the home with manners, and that included me, she said, the visitor who never offered to clear the table, do the dishes. When Levi belched, Evelyn jumped up and screamed, said he did it at her, then asked why I was just letting Vicky sit there being sad. Wasn't that my job after all, keeping them all happy so they would not remember they were in a home for incompetent people, so they could forget life sucked?

"We should talk about good things," I said, and turned back to Vicky, who was crying silently now.

—106—
"If we knew anything good, we wouldn't be here," Evelyn said. Levi pulled Vicky's untouched dinner toward him, and started on the peach cobbler. Vicky cried big tears then, and they rushed down her sunken cheeks to the corners of her mouth, so she stuck her tongue out often, licked the tears from her lips.

That was when I decided to put her to bed. I couldn't leave with her sitting and crying like that, and I knew I had to leave, cut my visit short. It would be my last visit. I admitted it to myself, but wished it weren't so, wished I were better, at least good enough to smile at pain. When I suggested a nap for Vicky, Evelyn said she herself was afraid to sleep, she had such bad dreams. She asked Vicky if she was afraid to die in her sleep, but then said death may be a blessing in disguise for one so old and sad and ruined.

I ignored Evelyn and tried to help Vicky up, but she was dead weight. I grasped her from behind, reaching around the hump and under her arms, and lifted. I was able to raise her only inches from the chair seat.

Levi left his seat suddenly, bounded across to the breakfront. Its door was ajar. He took a deep breath and slammed it shut, causing rice bowls, ginger jars, and ceramic cats to shake and rattle violently before settling back down. "Humbug," he said, pointing at me, then retreated to his room.

I used my paper napkin and tried to dry Vicky's tears, but she turned her head, kept twisting her face away from my hand. "I'm only trying to help," I said. Damn it. That's why I'm here.

"If I get the vacuum out," Evelyn said, "will you go over the living room?"

I pretended I had not heard. I was the cheerer upper, not the cleaning lady.

"My back's been hurting lately, or I'd do it. I just hate living in such a pig sty," Evelyn said.

I tried to raise Vicky one more time, reaching from behind and straining.

"Because I think you should at least do something useful. I mean, I know you think you're oh so good and all for coming to eat with the crazies, but we need some help, some real help."

"I'm helping Vicky." I shouted it. I almost added "you annoying bitch."

-107—

"Oh cheer up, Vicky," Evelyn said. She stepped over, put her face up against Vicky's. "You're a useless old woman and nobody loves you, either."

"Yes," I said to Evelyn. "Get the vacuum. You win. I'll do it. I'll clean your rug."

I followed her to the closet, stood right behind her when she opened the door and reached in for the upright, but before she could touch it, I shoved her in. I slammed the door hard enough to have made Levi proud, and left.

As I ran out into the warm Manoa mist, then slowed to a fast walk down the hill, past the golden shower trees in bloom, past the other plantation style sloping-roofed houses, I talked to myself about what goodness really meant, but came to no conclusions.

And later, after I fed Richard seafood salad, after we made a clean and pure missionary-position kind of love and were in my bed, listening to the waxy leaves of the fig tree outside clack in the night breeze—after all that, I told him everything. He remained

calm, looked deep into my eyes, and said I was selfish, self-centered, judgmental, lacking in compassion. I was the shallow snob his friends had warned him I'd be. He thought it best if we stopped seeing each other.

"Oh yeah?" I said, in spite of my expensive education. He dressed quickly, but I continued. "Oh yeah, St. Richard?" I said. "I'll tell you one thing." I said it all in a rush before he could reach my door. "Some people deserve closets. They belong there." Once he had let me shower with him, had let me sap his pale, freckled back and shoulders. I knew I would miss that. I already missed his giggle.

Burning Magnolias

Stephen Schreiner

On one of the busiest spots on campus
a pair of geese decided to build a nest.
She has a good perch while he waits below
waddling across an expanse of grass
down which students tumble and stride
on their ways home from class.
Each morning as I pass the mother
spread upon her clutch, looking
like a float that parades a small town
main street, feathers fluffing out around
her warm body, small tufts of down
gathered there like dust motes beneath a bed
she turns her head, resting on her broad breast,
in a circle to watch me; no matter where
I stop to turn and look at her
her eyes take me in. At first, the father
strutted toward me, his neck in a crook
like plumbing pipe or a snake about to rise
from the straw dark of a basket,
to spit from open lips
a premonitory hiss and frighten all
who crossed this bit of sidewalk between
classrooms. For a few days I saw students
throwing things at him, kicking sticks
at him as if he were a goalie, as one male
standing among a group of females, each
smoking a first cool cigarette since noon,
stood apart from his gaggle and preened.
The male moved about like one full
after a dinner at the club, hands in pockets
holding the tails of a coat open
or as if to display the watchchain
of a conductor, aisle by aisle, collecting tickets.
Once from a flat roof atop a five story chemistry

compound, a lone goose barked, disturbing
the passing throng. had he been jilted
in the earlier days when winter released
the pond surface and the ice slaked to one side
as though the little marsh bank were
draining a last gulp of cold?
The mother and father
having passed another night in which the dew
fell and the rain pounded down and the stars
shone, nights now for weeks as slow spring erupted
like research in a scientists' mind,
protect the things no one has seen yet,
the blue white eggs, the mystery of why
these long winged who gracefully fly
in a wedge across the dusk
should be this unchanging, patient pair
brought to earth amid a race of cackling
indifferent students in plumage meant to attract
one with longing.

The Editors

Nanora Sweet

for Guy and all the litmagers

As Editor-in-Chief, you've called us to
the part of town where avenues cut through
the grid of streets, to link a banker with
his factories, a brickyard with its railyard.
Where thoroughfares like these converge,
one corner widens out to hold a Racecourse,
another narrows into a Cathedral Close
(or so the street signs say, about a side
of town that loses me in plots like these).

One hundred years of change and dereliction,
and these avenues take their anchors
where they may, a voodoo shop midway
down the block or, whiter magic,
a lesbian coffeehouse that's sacred to
the goddess of the moon. It's never
easy for me to find my way, when ways
are X-s, turning into Y-s, that I make into
Z-s. But I will: I'll find you meeting
with the editors

—111—

Forty years ago, our
Editor-in-Chief called us to her father's
factory near this viaduct. He manufactured
salt by day and let us use his mimeograph
by night. Under cold light we circled, collating
our first magazine. It favored imagism and Zen.
My contribution parodied the Beats, as though
they needed it.

And now it's not so hard to find
your house inside a V of streets. Dangerous,
you say, but I feel safe in streets like these,
paved in their absolute regularity of bricks.

Your flat just glows, the long flight up,
the furniture you've made yourself. An artist
counts out photographs. A cursor blinks.
Eight editors proof pages, and then one breaks,
they read aloud from dictionaries. The poem
I'm reading set me up with jazz and bourbon.
I know this writer, we go way back. Someone
has dropped a line of his while typing...before
I leave, I'll put it back.

One reader calms a cat
over a manuscript. Others sit diagonally across
your polished table, making X-s underneath a lamp.
I leave unnoticed, cross your brick street that
cannot change, and lose myself, turn stop, go stop,
in the still-vanishing regularities of the grid.